

# Sermons at Christ Church

## Love, Re-Imagined

Pentecost  
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

*“When you looked at me. Your eyes imprinted your grace in me; For this you loved me ardently; And thus my eyes deserved To adore what they behold in you. . . . And let us go forth to behold ourselves in your beauty.” Amen.*

A couple of weeks ago a tornado touched down in Columbia. I wasn't in town when it did, but as I made my way home, I couldn't help but to notice the debris on the street. Over here at Christ Church, there were tons of tree branches and leaves strewn on both the lawn and the driveway. Some residents of Columbia were not so lucky, trees fell on their properties causing some significant damage. The power of the wind which caused so much destruction in Columbia and elsewhere isn't what we know to be the sound that came upon the disciples like the rush of a violent wind which filled the house where they were gathered, but it sort of gives you an idea of what it may have felt like. The disciples were scared, for the wind was violent, strong and fierce. But it lasted for a moment, and thereafter, they ceased to see the wind as a threat. What God breathed into us when he created us in the beginning would once again be given to us as a refreshing breath which powers us through life.

The breath, spirit or wind of God which is referred to as *ruach* in Hebrew is the creative power of God which has been communicated to you and me and all of God's creation. For that reason, when we talk about the *ruach* of God, the wind of God, the spirit of God and the breath of God, we are talking about your life and mine, and the power that sustains it. This *ruach* is present where God wills it to be so, and because God's will is directed toward His creation, the *ruach* is present in everything, and keeps all things alive. When we think about the breath of God, we have to admit that God is in all things and all things are in God.

Today is a very important day in the life of the Church. Today marks the day the Holy Spirit descended on the friends of Jesus. Today, we remember hearing the story about God, not in any one particular language but in the multiplicity of languages.

And we ask ourselves, how can a few fisherman who had barely received any education be able to change the world with the improbable story of God's visitation to us in the form of Jesus Christ? And they told the story with such an amazing conviction.

Many were those who heard the astonishing power of the sound that came in the form of a wind. They were bewildered. What must be going? They asked. The voice like a rushing wind lasted but for a moment and many curious minds came out of their homes to share with neighbors the strange violent wind they had heard. But as they gathered, filling all available space around, they heard and were astonished at the story being told by these men.

Peter spoke in his language of birth. He spoke what he knew but when he spoke the words as his people would speak, everyone out there heard these words in their own native language. They heard these words as if from a familiar voice. The words that Peter spoke needed no translation. The Holy Spirit was in that place, and this reality was present on everyone's face. Their fear turned to bewilderment, and they all began to speak. And when one finished, one went after. In the process they came to discover that the disciples were not some talented, tricky speakers, but that the spoken Word had become its own seeker-seeking those who would care to listen and believe.

Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter provides the prophetic context for their public testimony-God promised to pour down His Spirit upon all flesh so all may be empowered to say the unsayable, touch the untouchable, love the unlovable and embrace the path of suffering as part of our identity as people in whom God's indwelling spirit abides.

The ruach of God brings new possibilities to light. The ruach of God disrupts the status quo. She refuses to take the world as is, and instead flips it. She speaks into our reality, giving us eyes to see things as they are, so that we can deconstruct the world around us and embrace new realities. This would mean the courage to speak up. Fear often takes our language from us. Fear steals our thunder and subjugates us into minions. And if there's one remarkable story about Pentecost, it is one in which the courage of the disciples was such that no amount of bullying could deter them from telling the redemption story.

The story the disciples told offers new life by subverting old ones. The story subverts by taking us to the wilderness where we can only rely on the bread of God, the place where our sufficiency is rooted in the one God who gives us manna from above, and water from the rock. It is the place where we refuse to be consumed by the attractions of a world which goes to great length to convince us of our self-sufficiency, the

sure need to live like silos, and even worse than that, it convinces us of our need to mistrust and hate those who are different from us.

The new reality of Pentecost is about the insufficiency of hate, and the abundance of love, it is about the inadequacy of silo living and mentality and the renewal of a communal living. The point is the ruach of God not only convinces you of its same presence in the other, but through your participation in the waters of Baptism you come to identify yourself with the other person who also bears the seal of Christ as much as you do. Even if they do not bear the seal of Christ, they also bleed God's ruach because that is the life that God infused in each of us. The joy in all this is that we encounter every human being with the expectation of meeting God. For we have come to know that it is in these creatures like us that God awaits our love.

The reality of our world is one of an aching world. It is a world which yearns for truth, desires honesty and craves for love. The truth that our world cries for is not one where each can have his or her own version of truth or the one which want us to believe that some lives are more valuable than others. It is the kind of truth to which we call all attest; that life is valuable, and life is precious because God's ruach abides in all creation, including the life of Eli, who we will baptize this morning.

The gift of God's ruach comes from the countenance of God when it is turned towards human beings and shines on them. It is a gift that brings inward assurance in living, and new vital energies for life. It is for this reason that the psalmist cries "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Caste me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful spirit." When we get to this point in our lives, we live a more wholly life, and can undividedly affirm life. Our wanderings are over. Not only have we reached our goal, but we are conscious of God's happiness in us, and conscious of ourselves in God's bliss. This is the time when we long for the love in which we forget ourselves and at the same time find ourselves.

We cannot confine the Spirit to sacred moments or sacred places. To be sure, the Spirit is present there as well. But the Creator Spirit pervades all of life, creating goodness and beauty in the midst of suffering and death. The ruach of God burns to inspire hope in us and everyone for you are the universe looking at itself.

An author once wrote "Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary was God for us, and Pentecost is God in us." God in us, inspiring us for the work of ministry. We also have a testimony, the testimony isn't in any one particular language, and it is one that tells of God's goodness and purpose for the world. Let someone accuse you of being drunk, not with wine but with the ruach of life that is in you. And let the testimony of your life change the world. Amen.