

Early in the morning, there was the rush of a mighty wind. Straight line, hurricane force winds were so strong the large white pine tree in our front yard was knocked down and one very large branch abruptly pushed its way through our roof, landing on our living room floor. Trees were toppled throughout the city, hundreds of buildings and vehicles were damaged and power was down throughout most of the county. It was also a Sunday morning, and it just happened to be Pentecost Sunday. I will always remember worship on that day. Without electricity, we sang hymns by candle light. And, most memorable, accompanied by piano and not organ, the choir sang one of the great choral movements from *The Creation*, by Franz Joseph Haydn.

Great and mighty winds, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunami waves – they all fascinate us. When we experience these natural forces first hand, we gain a new respect for the immense power residing in nature. Nothing prepares us for the degree of such power. Unless we actually experience such a natural show of force, that type of power remains hidden and remote from the predictable routine of daily life. But, when we do experience it, life

changes. Power of this magnitude leaves behind unrecognizable landscapes and devastated communities. In an instant the world is turned upside down by a tremendous release of energy through wind, water, air, fire or earth.

Another power, a **creative** power of a very different dimension and magnitude informs our faith. It **is also** a power that changes lives, but in a very different way. This is the power the disciples experienced on the day of Pentecost. This is the power that was received by a small, insignificant group of men and women gathered in Jerusalem as they waited for a promise to be fulfilled. During that time of waiting, nothing could have prepared them for the strength and power that was about to hit them. Nothing could have prepared them for the magnitude of their enlightenment as they responded to the world-shattering, transforming, creative spirit of God. You see, to stand in its path was to catch fire with divine love. To stand in its path was to be shaken and stirred up by the presence of the divine. In an instant, their world was turned inside out and upside down by a tremendous rush of creative power released into their hearts and minds, souls and bodies – a power the writer of Luke/Acts describes as manifesting itself in tongues of fire upon their heads.

The creative energy that rushed in and was poured out among the disciples was more powerful than any of the natural powers and forces that **tear apart**. This was a power that shattered all previous perceptions. This power shook the ground of their being and the eyes of their hearts were opened to a world that was previously unknown. It was an experience that did not fit **any** of their previous experiences or categories. They saw a new world through new eyes. The many differences of culture and language that separated one from another crumbled under the force of this **unifying** power. Suddenly, in an instant, each could speak and hear with the same understanding as they told the stories of God's great love and mighty deeds.

While the power of nature opens up to us the enormity of its ability to destroy, the power of the Spirit cracks open and shatters the walls we create around our hard hearts and the power of the Spirit **creates**. This is power that creates new relationships among people and a new intimacy with God. Bridges and walls that are made by human hands **crumble** by the force of natural disaster. But, the Spirit **builds** bridges beyond time and space, bridges that bind the slave and the free, men and women, Jew and Gentile.

This is the power of the Spirit of God, the power that changes lives, the power that transforms lives, the power that sustains creation, the power that reunites what has been torn apart, the power that reconciles the alienated. This spirit of Pentecost is the power that rushes into the world as out of nowhere and breathes life in the midst of death.

Twenty-five years ago this June, I was touring Europe, doing a series of performances in several countries. It just so happened that we were in the northern part of Sweden, inside the arctic circle, for the summer solstice. On Sunday morning, we worshipped at a local Lutheran church. That faith community was celebrating the beginning of summer by holding their worship service outdoors and a guest minister from what was then East Germany happened to be preaching. Following the sermon, everyone stood to sing that great Swedish hymn *How Great Thou Art*. As the congregation sang in Swedish, the minister sang in German and we sang in English. I will always remember that worship service. While we were all singing in different languages, we sang with one voice. The Spirit was at work among us, uniting us and making us one, and I will always remember that time as an experience of Pentecost.

This is the power of Pentecost, the outpouring of God's spirit upon the disciples, then and now. You see, then and now, the Spirit rushes in and transforms our experience. Then and now, the Spirit breaks open the old to reveal the magnitude of God's connecting power and there is no returning to the old frame of reference. Then and now, lives are changed forever. Then and now, hearts are broken open to a dimension of relationship newly reconciled through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Then and now, God takes us, broken as we are, heals us and makes us ever new. Then and now, there is no end to the horizon of God's loving embrace.

As I think back and remember that Pentecost morning when a large tree branch broke through the ceiling onto our living room floor, I am **always** reminded that the creative energy of God **overwhelms** even the most destructive powers of man and nature. The creative Spirit of God transformed Jesus' death on a cross into the greatest act of love the world has ever seen. The creative Spirit of God raised Christ from the dead. And, it is that same creative Spirit that rushes in and through our own world, reconciling and reuniting all of creation through us, within us and for us – for the life of the world.