

## WILL THEY JUMP?

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The Day of Pentecost  
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Jesus said, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”* (John 16:12-13a)

Allow me to begin today with a confession. I miss the 1980s. For me, it was the decade that began with graduating from high school in 1980, and ended with graduating from seminary in 1989. In between those two personal bookends were all sorts of cultural markers that defined the time. MTV played music videos around the clock, and Michael Jackson was the king of pop. Women wore big hair, shoulder pads, and leg warmers. Men wished they could dress and look like the main characters of *Miami Vice*, *Sonny and Rico*. The New York Mets actually won a World Series, and the Yankees were the annual afterthought. Those were the days, my friend.

Midway through the 1980s the California Raisin Advisory Board noted that they weren't selling enough raisins. It was time for a new ad campaign to increase business, but what could be done? One executive quipped, *“We have tried everything but dancing raisins singing ‘I heard it through the grapevine.’”* Surprisingly, the idea caught on, and a new series of commercials hit the airwaves. Claymation California raisins, made to look and sound like Marvin Gaye, Ray Charles, Michael Jackson, and others danced and sang across television screens, and the consuming public couldn't get enough of them. Hit singles, primetime specials, and all manner of merchandizing soon followed.

At one point the fast-food chain, Hardee's, offered plastic figurines of the California Raisins as an inducement to buy their meals. You could even acquire a battery operated stage that looked like a slice of bread, and played the electronic notes of *“I heard it through the grapevine.”* A friend of mine in college had to have it. Once he had assembled all the figurines on the stage, he called a group of us over and we huddled around to see it. This was going to be great, he promised. He flipped the switch, the music began, and we waited for something to happen. Surely the figurines were spring-loaded and would suddenly jump. Perhaps the stage would vibrate and move them around, as if they were dancing. So we waited. And we waited some more. Nothing happened: no singing or springing, no vibrations or gyrations. Nothing. I can't recall how long we sat staring at the mute, immobile California Raisins, but it was too long to make any sense. They did not jump. They did not deliver.

Believe it or not, I remembered my brief encounter with the California Raisins when I first read today's Scripture passages from the Book of Acts and the Gospel of John. Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel of John we heard a portion of the long farewell that Jesus bid his disciples on the night before being handed over to suffering and death. He told them that he was going away to be with the Father, and that, strangely, it was to their advantage that he take leave of them (16:7). Why? Because he would send them the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who would lead them into all truth. Indeed, the same Spirit of God that filled Jesus would come to animate the disciples with the very life of God.

Today's reading from Acts (2:1-21) tells us how and when the Spirit came. It was fifty days after Easter, and ten days after the risen Jesus had departed from the company of his disciples. They were gathered together, still in Jerusalem, perhaps in the Temple. Nothing much was happening. Correction: nothing was happening. They were sitting around doing nothing. Then,

suddenly, it was as if God flipped the switch. A sound like the rush of a mighty wind filled the house, and they saw visions of divided tongues of fire resting on each of them. Everyone began speaking about the mighty works of God, but those who had gathered from near and far to celebrate the Jewish festival heard the proclamations in their own native languages. It was Peter who eventually stood up and declared that Jesus had delivered on his promise. God had poured out his Spirit upon them, and filled them with such new life that they could scarcely contain themselves.

We might think that here we have another story of something that happened back in those good old Bible days, but not something that happens today – at least not in respectable Episcopal circles. If the truth be known, in the long history of the church, Christians throughout the world have experienced many periods of the Spirit's outpouring. From our vantage point in the Episcopal Church, the most recent of these began in 1960. The Rev. Dennis Bennett was the Rector of St. Mark's Church in Van Nuys, CA. The church was growing according to traditional, institutional 1950s measurements. All was going well. Then Dennis Bennett had a spiritual awakening that he described as a "baptism in the Spirit." He knew a closeness with the living Jesus that was entirely fresh for him. He began speaking in tongues and sharing the experience with small groups of parishioners. On Palm Sunday of 1960 he described all this in his sermon, and essentially launched the Charismatic renewal movement in the church. In short order, various ministries that focused on spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues and healing, were a leading edge of the church's national agenda. Prayer groups formed in many churches, and participants actually assumed Someone was on the other end of the line, not only listening, but speaking. Renewal weekend retreats wouldn't let you sleep until you'd met Jesus. Things were jumping! The Spirit was moving into the mainstream.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit tends to make people nervous. Then as now, people aren't sure they want the gift. The fact is, Palm Sunday 1960 at St. Mark's Church in Van Nuys wasn't exactly a happy day. In the middle of Dennis Bennett's sermon, the associate rector took off his vestments and stormed out of the service. Bennett came into immediate conflict with the vestry, and by the end of the day he had resigned. If the events at St. Mark's launched the charismatic movement, it's because Time and Newsweek magazines picked up on the controversy and the story went national. Bennett moved to Seattle, where he took on a dying Episcopal church, and with his charismatic gifts soon had them jumping for Jesus. For the next decades, the charismatic movement ran neck and neck with other concerns in the Episcopal Church – social action and liturgical renewal being the primary two. Eventually, these latter two agendas seemed to capture more of the church's institutional attention, and the charismatics moved to the margins.

It's a pity and a puzzle. It's a pity because a church without an awareness of the Spirit's power or a touch of the charismatic brings to the world all the excitement of the immobile California Raisin figurines on their plastic stage. Will they jump? Will they sing? No, and watching for any length of time doesn't make sense. Nothing happens! But the Spirit's power in the church is also a puzzle. It's almost as if the church can only bear so much of the Spirit in limited doses. From day-one the church has struggled to stay unified during the outpourings of the Spirit. Some receive particular spiritual gifts, others don't, and a certain us-them mentality can develop. If you read the New Testament, you'll see that the Apostle Paul would have to write to the churches, not to congratulate them on how they were dwelling together in unity, but to wrangle the factions and argue for the complementarity of gifts. So it is that some look at the charismatic movement in the church and see it as a puzzle, or even a problem. Yes, the Spirit brings life, but at the cost of unity, self-control, and proper church decorum. In comes the Spirit and out goes the organ. Bring on the guitars. Let's start speaking in tongues and jumping for Jesus. Everybody clap you're your hands. "Wow! That's a lot of damage," conclude many church members, who say no thank you to the gift of the Spirit. Let's just keep things the way they are.

Is the Holy Spirit active today, right here and now? And is it possible for you and me as individuals, and for us as a church to participate in the life of God that is on offer? Of course the Spirit is here. Of course it's possible for us to participate. And not only is it possible, but a world groaning in travail desperately needs an infusion of people filled with the Spirit of God. In the Book of Acts we read that when the Spirit came, it was like the rush of a mighty wind. I've shared with you before the origins of an old term that we still use in common speech: the doldrums. When we speak of ourselves as being "caught in the doldrums," we are admitting to a sense of listlessness. The doldrums is originally a nautical term harking back to the days of great sailing ships. It refers to a belt of motionless air that circles the earth slightly north of the equator. If a ship ventured into the doldrums, it could sit there immobilized for days or weeks with no wind in its sails. All that those on board could do was wait for the wind to return to get them going again.

On that first Day of Pentecost the disciples were caught in the doldrums. To be sure they'd experienced the appearances of the risen Jesus. But it wasn't until Pentecost that the Spirit blew wind into their sails, and got them going as the church. This is why we often speak of Pentecost as the birthday of the church. If you think of the church as a great ship sailing toward a sacred destination, it's the Spirit of God who puts the wind into our sails and launches us on a mission. What is our sacred destination? What is our mission? In these turbulent days it cannot be any calm and comfortable port. Any time we head in the direction of the world's pain and need, it seems to me that the Spirit of God is our inspiration. Come, Holy Spirit. Come like the wind and merge with our spirits to do your work in the world.

On the first Day of Pentecost, the Spirit came, and divided tongues, as of fire, rested on each of them. Now that the winter is past, the hissing radiators and slamming pipes in the rectory finally have gone silent. Actually, I rather like the cacophony, even when it wakes me on winter nights because I know that fire from the boilers is warming the house and making it livable. I've often thought that the warmth surging through the pipes is a metaphor of how the Spirit should affect the church. The Spirit brings warmth and hospitality. Anytime we open our doors and welcome the stranger and extend the hand of friendship to those outside our walls, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Hospitality is a spiritual gift. Come, Holy Spirit. Come like the fire to warm our souls so that we can share hearth and home with others.

Finally, speaking in tongues, the spiritual gift that tends to make people the most nervous of all. What is it? On the one hand, I can't comment because praying in tongues is not my spiritual gift (and I'm really fine with that). On the other hand, it's clear that what the Spirit was doing on the first Day of Pentecost was reversing the Tower of Babel's curse. People in Jerusalem of many nationalities heard the disciples' speaking of God's deed of power in their own native languages. They understood each other. What is the language of the Spirit? What can it mean to speak in tongues? It seems to me that any time we strive to speak the language of peace and reconciliation, we are not far from the Pentecost experience. The Spirit can go to work on a small scale, as between two people, or on a large scale, as between two nations. I wonder: is it possible that the Spirit of God is quietly at work on the Korean peninsula, inspiring the change in language we've been hearing from the various movers and shakers? We pray that it may be so, and that it continues.

How about you? Would you like to experience personally the power of the Holy Spirit? What I wish I could do is provide you with a little prayer you could pray so that – presto! – you'd be filled with the Spirit. What I wish I could do is bottle up the Spirit so that you could unscrew the cap and have a dose of Christ's life whenever you needed it. I can't bottle up the Spirit, but I can offer you the bread and wine of the Eucharist, blessed with the Spirit of Jesus, so that he may dwell in us and we in him. I can't bottle up the Spirit, but God does sanctify the water of baptism today, so that those who here are cleansed from sin and born again may continue in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior. And I can urge you to do one thing more: wait with eager anticipation.

The risen Jesus urged the disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, which is exactly what they were doing on the Day of Pentecost: waiting and expecting. Let me tell you: something happened.

Rumor has it that the Spirit of Christ will be coming again. The Spirit of Christ will come again to put wind in our sails, and holy fire in our souls, and the language of peace and reconciliation on our lips. The Spirit will come and guide us into all truth. How do I know? Well, to paraphrase Jesus, I have many things still to tell you, but at this hour you can't bear any more. For now, let's just say *I heard it through the grapevine*.

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