

Complete the following statement for yourself:

Things Will never be the same if ... Things will never be the same if...

Pentecost is a story full of marvels and wonders: holy fire, impassioned speech, and divine gifts. It provides so much theological reflection on the Holy Spirit. The *Book of Acts* gives us Luke's perspective. It is a story of Jesus' disciples, friends, his mother and family, all being transformed by the Spirit of God. In Corinthians Paul's describes what a vibrant Christian community looks like – and it is RICH in a diversity of people and gifts. And finally in John, we have a story of hope – hope that overcomes fear, forgives sin, and transforms hurt. But the reality at the heart of the coming of the Holy Spirit whenever, and wherever it happens, is this: *Things will never be the same again.*

For centuries Christians have prayed the prayer *Veni Sancte Spiritus – Come, Holy Spirit* – but we often forget that Luke says the Spirit's arrival is *like the rush of a VIOLENT wind*. We like to think that the power of the Spirit is something we can domesticate for our own benefit. Yet Paul reminds us that these diverse gifts come to us “*as the Spirit chooses, and for the common good.*” And certainly, the hope and peace that the Spirit brings to the bereft disciples in John's gospel does not sugar coat anything. The disciples only recognize the risen Lord Jesus when he shows them his wounds.

We celebrate Pentecost for many reasons: the coming of the Spirit; the revelation of the Third Person of the Trinity; and also, the birthday of the Church. But we could just as easily name it *The Feast of Things-Will-Never-Be-The-Same!* I say this because anytime we pray “come Holy Spirit” we are asking for trouble ... NOT JUST CHANGE. We cannot control, predict or sentimentalize this kind of power. When we pray “come Holy Spirit” we are praying for the Kingdom of Heaven, and we know what happened to Jesus when he did that. When we pray “come Holy Spirit” we are ASKING for what the theologian John Caputo calls “*the INCOMING of what we did not SEE coming.*” (JDC pp. 54-55)

We should not confuse the Spirit's arrival with mere change. Change is occurring around us and even within us ALL THE TIME! But God's Pentecost is something qualitatively DIFFERENT from mere change. We are creatures who live in time, and one definition of time is that it is a measure of change. So it seems to me that in those moments of inspiration, when the Spirit of God comes to us, we are taken from where we are and dropped into an eternal moment - and what a powerful moment it is! It's the kind of moment that changes things, the kind of moment that makes a mark on our lives. This is NOT the kind of moment we can get our arms around, because the moment possesses US more than we could possess it. And so yes, the coming of the Spirit does bring change. But this change is not just the NEXT NEW THING. The Spirit's power is something we can KNOW but not EXPLAIN, it CHANGES US before WE can change our circumstances. What it is, is THE POWER TO HOLD MEMORY OPEN TO A NEW IMAGINATION.

Holding memory open to new imagination is not easy. After all, the stories we tell about ourselves, and our past become our traditions, customs, institutions, and history. We DO NOT WANT our memories to be open. WE WANT THEM TO BE KNOWN AND SETTLED! If our memories, stories, or customs are good and pleasant: we will leave well enough alone. If our memories, stories or customs are painful or hurtful, we want to forget them. Either way, we want it settled, we DO NOT want to reopen a memory to new imagination. But that's what the coming of the Spirit does: the Spirit HOLDS THE PAST OPEN, and it holds it open to healing and to the future. The Spirit neither sentimentalizes nor discards our memories. This is neither utopian nor nostalgic. It is CHARISMATIC, it is full of gifts and resilience to move forward. The Spirit lives in the present moment. It is not just a new analysis of the past, and certainly not a flowery prediction of the future. The Spirit comes to ground us now, in the present, and to hold memory open so we can imagine a healed future; to hold our stories open so we can imagine new chapters; to hold open our traditions so we can imagine new customs.

We all remember the Grinch! He thought things would never be the same if he took away the traditions in Whoville, and yet Christmas came anyway. Henry VIII destroyed the shrine of St. Thomas in Canterbury Cathedral, yet pilgrims still tread those 1000-year-old steps, to pray at an empty grave now marked by a simple, solitary candle. Adolph Hitler murdered 12 million people to bury the memory of Jews, Gypsies, the disabled, and LGBT people. Yet, unimaginably, their stories have been reclaimed and renewed in these last 75 years. And today, we hear again the story of the risen Lord Jesus, whose resurrected body still bore the memory of suffering, and the marks of injustice. Jesus and his memory, have been forever transformed by one moment of contact with the Spirit's power.

As we come to the end of this Easter Season we need to think about the places the Spirit might blow upon us this in this coming year. We need to ask ourselves: *Things will never be the same if* and we need to pray for the strength, the healing and especially the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We will need those gifts to imagine new stories; stories that heal the memories we bring with us, and to prepare us for an amazing encounter with the Kingdom of Heaven. The great 14th century English mystic, Julian of Norwich, reassures us in all of this when she says: *In our creation we had a beginning ... but the love wherein God made us was in God with no beginning ... and ... without end.*

My friends: may the Spirit of God strengthen your faith, inspire your hope, and enflame your life with love when you least expect. Amen.

Sources:

John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* 2007, pp 54-55.

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love.*

JP Sampley, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, NIB, Volume X, 1994.