

As the Father has sent me, so I send you

Pentecost comes in two sizes. There is St. Luke's account in today's first reading. It's a blast! A social thing! The Spirit of God drives the timid early followers of Jesus out of their safe house – amid fire and wind - whence they now fearlessly proclaim the good news of Christ, of universal divine Grace to a crowd from every region within and beyond the Roman Empire. They broadcast the story of Israel as one of emancipation, the call of the prophets and of Jesus for justice versus the tyranny of discriminate, imperial ways of exploiting human existence.

Which reminds me of how our own times changed back in the 1960's. Take for example the hymns we used to sing before the 1960's – like *Jesus, Jesus, come to me / All my longing is for thee / Of all friends the best thou art / Make of me thy counterpart*. Very personal, "pious", about God and me – the rest of the world out of sight. Then there was the frequent *Mother, Dear, Oh pray for me / While far from heaven and thee / I wander in a fragile bark / O'er life's tempestuous sea* – again aimed at one's being consoled amid life's worries. Maybe some of you remember *Soul of my Savior, sanctify my breast, / body of Christ, be thou my saving guest . . .* which I still sing sometimes – privately - while driving alone somewhere, for the sentiment it awakens.

But come the 1960's and there arose a world-wide upsurge of social strife, of movements seeking freedom and social justice – here in the U.S. by way of the Civil Rights movement and elsewhere – as in Algeria, Cuba, Eastern Europe, South Africa, Chile, Argentina . . . you name it. An earthquake was taking place – wind and fire. And in our own Church – what with the Council of Vatican II – with the altar turned around and the vernacular allowed – among other revisions in church practice and teaching – we felt the shaking of our foundations as well: people demanding recognition, leadership confused, people as it were "speaking in tongues" – things they never dared say before.

And note the effect on the hymns that took over then – to the strumming of guitars and a different beat: *God of all the hungry nations / God who suffers with the poor, / still our greed keeps us from sharing / with the hungry at our door . . . Or: Come! / Open your heart! / Show your mercy to all those in fear! We are called to be hope for the hopeless, so all hatred and blindness will be no more! . . . We are called to act with justice . . .* Notice how such hymns are not simply addressed to God but to ourselves as emissaries of freedom and justice . . . Much in the Spirit of St. Luke's early Christian movement.

But in a world nowadays more secular than Christian the favored way to achieve social justice, economic equity is to *legislate* change – and that's *a real plus* if we can sustain the effort. But that brings us to that *other account of Pentecost* as told in today's Gospel reading in which there is no wind or fire but the appearance of the risen Jesus uttering *Peace be with you* – and then it says: *he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* In other words, Pentecost also has to do with you and me each inhaling the breath, the life, the nature of Christ – without which personal transformation legislation alone will remain fragile from age to age.

And so I'm thankful for a hymn that goes way back into the 19th century – quite simple yet majestic. I wish I could communicate its old Celtic melody but here is the lyric: *Breathe on me, breath of God / Fill me with life anew / That I may love what Thou dost love / And do what Thou wouldst do.*

Geoff Wood