

Day of Pentecost – June 5, 2022

Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”

**Pentecost is chaos. Madly rushing wind, tongues of
flame, gobs of people from far and wide, accusations of
drunken revelry at 9 in the morning ...**

**I’ll confess I’ve made it something of a tradition to nod
to both my Nordic roots and my baptism in the Foursquare
Gospel church and tip back a bottle of Pentecost “ol,” if you**

will, after the conclusion of Sunday services most years, with a toast to Saint Peter's detractors: "It's 9 o'clock somewhere."

But Pentecost is also an organization within the chaos. It's the founding of the organization that is the church, of course. Happy birthday, dear church. You don't look a day over 19 hundred and 89.

But it's grounded in the organization of God's self into the Trinity, a relationship we will try to tackle in a bit more depth next Sunday as is the custom. And it's the Holy Spirit, the trickiest of the trio that we look to today, making like Jesus and not only troubling but also calming the waters.

Think of what happens at that first Day of Pentecost. The devout Jews from Parthia speaking Parthian, I presume it would be, the Elamites ... Elamian? OK, I don't know all the smaller, more obscure tongues involved in this cacophony but there is surely Aramaic, Arabic, Greek and more, not to

mention dialects of varying degrees of mutual intelligibility. Modern linguists love to say a language is a dialect with a flag. Now in ancient times, flags weren't quite so important. Nevertheless, there should be no way everyone hears and understands the words coming from the apostles' mouths. This isn't the 20th and 21st century United Nations, with diplomats listening to a simultaneous translation in an earpiece provided to them.

The mechanism of the miracle? Literally, God only knows. There's a reason we say the Spirit is a tricky one. But however it happens, it happens. It's not that those who shouted down Peter and company didn't experience the same phenomenon. They just couldn't process it. Now I love Occam's Razor myself: the simplest explanation is the likeliest one. But it's not foolproof. And I'm sure the apostles' morning libations were indeed zero-proof.

No small significance of the miracle here is making sense amidst the madness. An astounding and unexpected moment of clarity between gale-force winds and midday eclipses and blood moons. Between the last persecution and the next. Between one wave of violence and the next crashing down on a historically long-subjugated people.

Come, Holy Spirit, indeed.

Yes, between the mass shooting Wednesday that added a reminder that the doctor's office is no more safe than a school, a supermarket or a church building and the assembly this weekend in California that has torn friends and colleagues and a synod apart, further threatening the stability of the whole ELCA as a church body; between COVID tests and lengthening prayer lists for all kinds of personal tragedies and traumas, I, for one, am begging for a moment of clarity and fortifying.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come and surprise us. Come and enliven us. Come and turn everything upside down.

Do you notice how the prophecy from Joel kind of subtly subverts expectations? Isn't it the young who are supposed to dream? Heads in the clouds with all kinds of pie-in-the-sky ideas that sound nice but those of us with a little more experience under our belts know better than to take seriously. Isn't it the mature, the wise, the sage among us who are to dispense wisdom ... visions full of insight you don't get without seeing a few things in your time?

But no.

It will be in the days to come, God says, and I paraphrase... but Peter gives me permission by way of paraphrasing Joel, I might add ... it will be that your young people will have visions, and your older folks will dream dreams. Prophecy is revelation and revelation is revealing what's already there. Is there anybody here willing to admit

that they might be classifiable as old ... and yet you dream big? Maybe you think those dreams are gone. But maybe it's still too soon to give up. Maybe it's time to share those dreams and see what the Spirit may have in store with them.

Is there anybody here who is young enough to be excited about birthdays still? Maybe you have some wisdom, some insights that can be found in that space that for the rest of us consists of a blind spot. Maybe you aren't meant to just be the future of the church but to be the now of the kingdom of God where it's at today, this very moment.

The blood, the smoke, the fire. We've all seen it. It isn't stopping. Not yet. But in the midst of it, we can see other things. The deeds of God's power through the ages, past, present and future. The very image of God and the glory of God inherent in it, in one another's face.

There was some distrust, to be sure, among those who gathered from the corners of the Empire on that Pentecost

day in Jerusalem. They came together to celebrate a festival of the spring harvest, and by what had become custom, the giving of the law to Moses at Mount Sinai and the birthing of their faith. But in the years intervening they had grown apart not just physically but culturally, with varying degrees of influence from the Greek and Romans depending on where you were. There wasn't necessarily an impulse to come together and look side to side at one another. Just up or ahead toward God.

But God doesn't want that. And that tricky Holy Spirit. Her name in Greek, the paraclete, it can be translated as advocate, and that's cool. It's powerful. There's a great need for advocacy for our siblings as God's children, the last and the least among us. Those who bear an additional burden and lack privileges others hold due to race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, all sorts of other factors. But the word can also be translated as companion. From Latin,

that is literally “with bread.” It’s easy to gather that right away if you know a little of the Latin-based Spanish language. *Con pan*. But all this linguistic loop-de-loops is to remind us that that tricky old Holy Spirit, she is about breaking bread together. Coming to the table with one another and seeing eye to eye. Setting aside differences for a moment to share in our humanity with one another.

We do that in the communion meal. We do that informally at our traditional after-church brunch or lunch spot. We do it in an underrated but sacred manner with our families at dinner.

And maybe there, if nowhere else, we begin to glimpse some of that clarity. Blink our eyes a few times and gather that vision. Whether day or night, begin to indulge in a hopeful and powerful dream.

May it be so. With me. And also with you.

Amen.