

Acts 2:1-21
I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All Flesh
 Day of Pentecost ~ Holy Communion ~ Graduate Recognition
 Communion Meditation
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Introduction to Scripture Text

Today is the day we get to talk about the birth story of the church. From it we can learn something about who we are and why we are. Truth is, we were born in a surprising way, at a certain time. Like most birth stories, it didn't begin on the day the church was born, on Pentecost. Yet this was the day that the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, takes the driver's seat with an amazing and perplexing turn that no one could ignore. Remember last week, in Acts 1:5 when Jesus said to the apostles, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now?" Today's story is about that day when God's life-giving Holy Spirit came rushing in, with wind and fire, touching *everyone* who gathered that day.

Today, the children and all of you are invited to help tell the story, the birth story of the church. Since it involved the rush of a mighty and violent wind blowing all the way from heaven, Emmett Cooper has loaned us a few of his fans to help us with sound effects. We also have these pinwheels to help us see how Holy Spirit wind blew and blew. When I cue you, *start the fans* and hold the pinwheels so we can all see the wind blowing, blowing, blowing. Next, we are told, divided tongues of fire appeared, resting on each of them. So everyone (Yes, everyone of every age with a pinwheel) sitting in the pews, *when I cue you*, place your pinwheel behind the head of a person in front of you or near you and keep it there.

One more action to teach and we will be all set for this multi-voiced, multi-sensory reading of God's Holy Word. Right after the crowd rushes in upon hearing these strange sounds, the apostles began speaking in all the multiple native languages of those gathered. At this miracle, and this loud cacophony of sound, Luke writes, "All were amazed and perplexed." Let me see with your face and body "amazed" now let's try "perplexed" – And we are told that they said to one another, "*What does this mean?*" Put together your amazed face, your perplexed face, and the phrase: "What does this mean?" Say it to the person on either side of you, then behind and or front of you: (demonstrate) What does this mean? What does this mean? What does this mean? (We will say it 3 times).

Are you ready? Let's do it together! And as we do, let's listen and watch and let the Holy Spirit speak to us through this reading & experiencing of Acts 2:1-21.

Meditation

What does this mean? It was loud, it was messy, it was confusing. God playing with fire again. But it wasn't a burning bush in the wilderness. This time it was "divided tongues of fire" in the city of Jerusalem during the Jewish Festival of Pentecost or Festival of Weeks. Their planned Festival was already in full swing, when all of a sudden it did not go according to "Plan A." Instead, the Holy Spirit became the midwife, birthing this new thing we now call, the church. Imagine that: the Holy Spirit ran off the rails and did not follow the bulletin.

Jesus had told them about the coming of the Holy Spirit after his ascension. "Not many days from now"—a due date of sorts. Long before that, through the prophet Joel, God had said, "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." But now? Like this? Strange sounds of roaring wind, singed hair follicles, yarmulkes flying like mini Frisbees; people running—"Get the doctor!! The baby isn't coming at all like we expected."

What does this mean? They couldn't make heads or tails of it. The Holy Spirit on tap gushing forth, with so many strange sounds: the apostles speaking about God's deeds of power in multiple languages. Most amazing of all: Everybody understood everyone else. No translation needed. Think about that for a second: no translation needed among these people from city and country, Jew and Gentile, Arab and Cretan, educated and illiterate.ⁱ

What does this mean? The text from Joel reads: "I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh." Yes, *all* flesh? Babies' behinds, toddlers' skinned knees, teens' oily acne'd foreheads? Tattooed, pierced, wrinkled, scarred, bruised, swollen, and freckled flesh? Red, Yellow, Black and White Flesh? Conservative and liberal flesh, Evangelical and Progressive flesh; Republican, Democrat, Independent, Libertarian; and all other flesh I have not thought of? Yes: All flesh.

What does this mean? I hear God calling us to stop using and abusing religion, or wielding the Bible as a weapon to divide, control, or manipulate people. God doesn't. Neither should we. Loving others as God loves us: that's why we're here. God sent us Jesus to showed us what Divine Love looks like in human form and then Jesus gave us the new commandment just before he departed this earth: "Love one another as I have loved you." It's all about the power of Love, as Bishop Michael Curry preached about so eloquently yesterday at the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. If you haven't already heard it, I recommend you watch it on YouTube.

That wedding struck me as a Pentecost moment—the diversity of styles in the British royal context blowing Pentecost wind on an international scale with viewers from around the world breathing in the spectacle. I think the term "amazed and perplexed" could be used accurately to describe the faces and body language of those listening to the Bishop's stirring sermon. One news commentator described it

metaphorically: “it was like putting oysters and custard together” on the same plate. And what a beautiful thing indeed. Love wider. Love deeper, love like Jesus loves us. That’s why God birthed the church. That’s why we are here. Our birth story reminds us of the call to “Expand the circles of concern. Be bi-lingual, tri-lingual, multi-lingual: strive to speak more fluently and listen more closely until we come to a place where we know each other’s languages,” as Jill Duffield, editor of the Presbyterian Outlook wrote earlier this week.ⁱⁱ

Yesterday, here in our Parlor, we offered a “Know Your Rights” workshop for our immigrant neighbors from Mexico who live and work here in our community. We had twenty-five folks attend: men, women, young adults, and children. The workshop was primarily conducted in Spanish: a language I wish I knew. They had questions and we had experts who could offer answers, in their own language. I hear the Holy Spirit on this Pentecost; in this year of 2018 where we seem to be getting more and more divided, calling us to bridge the divides by learn each other’s languages. Especially the ones we don’t want to learn. That’s the work of the church!

What would the Holy Spirit want for a birthday present? For our church life to give witness to a wider love—beyond our own people. Yes, to learn the languages of those who tune into other media sources and stations than the ones we choose. For those of us over fifty: to learn the language of young adults, teens and children. Why listen and take them seriously? They shall prophesy, says the Lord.

What does this mean? That’s right: it’s time to cross the line. It’s time to stop drawing boundaries and borders. It’s time to think beyond those categories when we think about really being church. As much as we’d like to think that somehow God likes us just a little bit better than those who are “not us” This story shouts out with sound and fury—God came in the form of Christ for *all* flesh: whatever their nation, their race, their state of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual health. Whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity may be. No matter how they dress, or may cause you stress. It’s the call to love, to fight for justice for the “not us.”

The Holy Spirit is telling us: the more diverse we are the more we look like the church we were born to be. Luke goes into great detail (Acts 2:9-11) about all the different people—15 nations symbolic of the whole world, crossing every line—Jewish and Arab (yup, still having trouble with that), city and country (this one too); those born into the faith (Jews) and converts (proselytes--no we never judge people by the state of their faith)—it was when *all* these folks were gathered, speaking and listening to each other that God birthed the church.

“We Choose Welcome.” You likely saw our sign on the front lawn. You may have wondered, “what does this mean”? The full sentence is this: “We choose welcome, not fear.” It means we here at FPC are fueled by the fire of Pentecost to proclaim: “In the midst of fear of terrorism and radicalism, we choose to welcome those who flee from terror and tyranny. In the midst of hate speeches and hate crimes, we choose to welcome those who are rejected because of their skin color or their foreign

dress.” This comes from the proclamation of The Rev. Gradye Parsons, former Stated Clerk of the PC(USA) in response to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. And still today, now more than ever we are called to choose love, not fear: Christ’s unconditional love.

Today, our hearts are breaking once again from the news of the high school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas. Ten lives lost, many more wounded: physically and spiritually, families in Santa Fe and across our nation. Perhaps what grieved my heart the most from the coverage I heard, was the wise and winsome student who said she wasn’t surprised by the mass shooting at her high school. And that while she would be graduating so wouldn’t have to worry; she was worried for her younger siblings who still had to get through high school. And Jesus wept.

We need to let the Holy Spirit blow the healing power of Christ’s love to heal the hurt, the fear, and the hate that turns violent that divides and destroys us. What does this mean for us, here in Marshfield? What response will we choose? Will we retreat into our divided opinions on gun rights and gun control, shouting into our own echo chambers? Or will we let the Holy Spirit open our ears and hearts to listen to those with whom we disagree? Let’s be first to start those conversations.

Perhaps that sounds too hard. You’ve come to the right place: the Lord’s Table. Think for a moment, whom are we *not* listening to because we don’t want to understand them? The answer to this question will be different for each of us. But let the Holy Spirit identify for you whom that might be for you right now, and bring that person or group of people to the Table, Christ’s Table with you. As you are fed with the body and blood of Christ, pray for the power of Christ’s unconditional Love to open the way to understanding, to compassion, and to justice. Pray that our church give the gift of widening our Love, on this her birthday. Amen.

ⁱ This phrase “no translation needed” comes from Jill Duffield, Editor of Presbyterian Outlook’s May 18, 2018 Lectionary Reflection, <https://pres-outlook.org/author/jduffield/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.