

Day of Pentecost May 28, 2023

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

We have heard the story many times. The rush of a mighty wind, all too familiar to those of us in the Midwest, that tornadic roar that fills to overflowing the room in which the disciples find themselves. The coming of the promised Holy Spirit. The ruach, pneuma, wind, breath, spirit of God. The same one that brought order out of the chaos of the deep in Genesis.

My colleagues and I talked about that this week. Does the Spirit of God, the breath of God that brings life to Adam and Eve, the spirit that descends upon Jesus at his baptism and throws him into the wilderness, that fills the eleven on this Pentecost Sunday, does it bring order or... not chaos... but perhaps disorganization? Some might say, freedom.

The witness of scripture is that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills. That it shows up in surprising ways. Often beyond the imagination of the organized church. Look at Acts 15- the first assembly of Christian leaders, the first Council, trying to discern whether Gentiles needed to become Jews to be followers of Jesus. What turned the church to saying no to that requirement was the testimony of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas about the presence of the Holy Spirit in those Gentiles who had been baptized but who were not following Jewish Law. If the Holy Spirit, the breath of God is present in these people, then it must be something God approves of. A surprise to a church based in Jerusalem and peopled by Jewish Christians. There have been other surprises of the Holy Spirit- present in the Reformation of Luther, in the rejection of slavery as acceptable, in

the acceptance of women as Pastors, acceptance of those who are in the LGBTQ community as Pastors. God's Spirit acting in ways the church didn't see right away. Not chaos, but boundary expanding.

I believe.. the Spirit does the will of God. In Genesis, it brings order, yes, but more importantly, within the Trinity, it brings life. The orderedness of creation, the relationship of one thing to another within creation makes life as we know it possible. The Holy Spirit does the will of God and calls and equips believers to live as God wants them to live.

But how is that?

Look at what the Spirit on this day of Pentecost does. It rushes in and fills the disciples to overflowing with the Spirit so that they begin to speak languages as the Spirit gives them ability. What each person who comes hears puzzles them, because here are these hicks from the backwater of Galilee who are speaking in their particular idiom. In a way they can understand. Telling them about the mighty acts of God. The story of God's pursuit of God's people from the creation of all that exists through Jesus.

What if the miracle there is not suddenly their ability to speak Spanish, or German, or Latin, but rather that they are able to speak in a way that folks different from them- scholars, plumbers, Gen Z can hear and understand? I wonder if this is what Paul means when he talks about being all things for all people. Not that he switches who he is, but that he gets to know people well enough to relate to them, talk to them in their own particular way. We all do this to one extent or another. I will speak differently to my parents than I do to my

peers. I speak differently in a formal setting than I do an informal one. We all code switch, attune our speech to the people and place that we are in. Not trying to be something that we aren't but so that we might more clearly communicate. And not only that but being able to speak in that way means you have taken the time and effort to learn to do that. You have taken the time to be in relationship with folks who speak that way. And that call to relationship seems to me to be what God is calling us to as human beings. How God calls us to live. How we are created to be.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians points to this. In Corinth, the coming of the Holy Spirit is not a unifying thing, but one that divides. People think their particular Spirit given gift is better than someone else's. It is tearing that community apart. So Paul reminds them, yes there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. Each gift is vital to the full functioning of the whole. Like a body, each member plays a part. From the brain to that little thing hanging down from the back of your throat. The Spirit unifies us, as it descends on us in baptism just as it did Jesus. And the gifts the Spirit brings are for the common good. Not our own glory or profit. The Spirit binds us in a mutually supporting and upbuilding relationship.

This is echoed by Jesus to the disciples in the locked room in our deja-vu Gospel reading, we last saw it on the Sunday after Easter. The retention and forgiveness of sins is not an individual thing, but a corporate, communal thing. If ya'll as the body of Christ forgive sins, they are forgiven. If ya'll retain them, they are retained. Why? Because ya'll have been given the Holy Spirit. The breath, the

wind, the fire, the voice of God. So be careful how you speak. As a community, does God in Jesus call us to proclaim forgiveness or condemnation more quickly?

The Spirit moves us into relationship with one another. It always pulls us towards one another. Anything that divides, that distinguishes in a way that separates, is contrary to that Spirit. That's Paul's point.

The Spirit we have all received at our baptisms unites us as one. For whatever gift we have- encouragement, proclamation, administration, teaching, electronics, computers, hospitality, you name it- comes from that Spirit and makes us one. And... moves us to reach out and be in relationship with other human beings, who that same Spirit enables us to see as those created in the image of God. As those worthy of love and care for that reason alone.

And so I would say the Spirit does not bring order or disorder, but rather it brings us, moves us, stirs us, blows us always into relationship with other human beings. It equips us to do this, to listen to others and the story of their lives, to speak in a way that they can understand. And this brings our lives and, in a small way, the world more in alignment with God's reign.

And this can be seen as being antithetical to order- when what the Spirit calls us to is contrary to how we or the world think things should go.

The Spirit is an extension of God who created all exists, of Jesus God's only Son. So she calls us to what God in Jesus calls us to. And we know what that is from all those readings in John, don't we. To love God with all that we are and to love our neighbor as ourselves. To be in relationship with others. To listen and attend to them, their lives, their stories.

And when we do so, that Spirit can do amazing things.

Like the story of Daryl Davis, a black blues musician who has spent time, over the last 30 years, befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan. It started when he was 25 and was approached in a bar by a white man who liked his playing. In their conversation Davis kept asking questions, even after finding out the man was a member of the KKK. This conversation planted a seed for Davis that led him to go around the country and sit with Klan leaders and members and find out, “How can you hate me when you don’t even know me?”

He studied about the Klan so he could speak in their idiom, their language. He found that whether they liked him or not, they respected the fact he had done his homework. That he had gotten to know them. As Davis said it, “It's when the talking ceases that the ground becomes fertile for violence. If you spend five minutes with your worst enemy — it doesn't have to be about race, it could be about anything...you will find that you both have something in common. As you build upon those commonalities, you're forming a relationship and as you build about that relationship, you're forming a friendship. That's what would happen. I didn't convert anybody. They saw the light and converted themselves.”

Led by the Spirit into relationship with those who many would say are his enemies. Who might even desire his death. Davis, through building relationships, has convinced 200 KKK members to give up their robes. Has transformed their understanding of their relationship with their fellow human beings, to see them as one created in God’s image and worthy of love and care.

This is the power of God's love, of the Spirit that each of us bears. That gives us the courage to love one another. Even those who would destroy us.

That is the miracle of this day. Not the spectacular gifts of speaking in tongues, or even the 3,000 who are transformed. It is that this homogenous group of men from Galilee were inspired by this Spirit, fired up by the love of God in Jesus Christ, so that they learned how others spoke, learned about their lives, so that they could speak this story of God come to us in Jesus to others in a way they could hear and understand. To make it easier for them to receive.

And, I would venture to say, in so doing, their own lives were transformed as well.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the longest season in our church calendar. One that focuses on the work of the church. Us. Living out Christ's call to go and be his witnesses throughout the world.

May we be so inspired, by our own encounters with the risen Jesus, with those who listen to us and our stories, that we would go into the world and be like Daryl Davis and listen, and speak, and befriend others so that they might see the light and be transformed. And in so doing, bringing the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding just a little more into this world that so desperately needs it.

Come Holy Spirit, Come!