

Send Out Your Spirit

Psalm 104; Acts 2:1-4

Pentecost Sunday

A Sermon Preached by Peter Ilgenfritz

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And on that day, a great wind tore through the room where they were gathered. Divided tongues as of fire rested upon them and they began to speak in the languages of the world. Those from far off and lonely places heard a Word of Life, of a God who is for them, in a way they could understand.

And on that day, some scratched their heads and said, “What the heck is going on?” Others rolled their eyes and said, “They are obviously drunk.” And some that day, filled with the Spirit of the Living God, were never the same again and went out to change the world as changed people. In their little corner of the world they ended poverty as they shared what they had so that no one was in need.

Today, here we are on this Pentecost Sunday and hear again a fantastic story about the founding of what would become the Christian Church.

Some of us scratch out heads at what is obviously a fairy tale. Luke’s attempt to pull out all the stops in order to help us get something that is finally beyond words: what it means to experience the presence and power of God’s Holy Spirit.

And some of us roll our eyes, “This has nothing to do with our lives”.

Some of us here today can tell you stories of being filled with this same Spirit and how their lives have been and are being changed because of that.

And others of us, sit here and wonder. In that place of wonder between hope and fear, “Could this possibly happen to me?”

To understand the story of Pentecost you have to understand that this story was written by a people in crisis for a people in crisis. For some of us, this is such a time. A time of transformation, of deep change when we are being broken open. Between a past that is no longer true - and a future that we do not yet know.

If this is not such a time of crisis in your life, then you need to remember what it was like to be in such a time of crisis, or to imagine what such a time might be like.

And the crisis then and now is this:

The first week of April now seems an eternity ago in my mind. And yet it was just seven weeks ago that we gathered here to sing the Hallelujah Chorus on Easter Sunday morning. Just over seven weeks ago we marked Holy Week and Good Friday when we

remembered the crisis of Christian faith – the death of the one whose way we seek to follow.

If you have been through a season of deep grief, you know that seven weeks is nothing. Nothing.

After his death, some followers of Jesus experienced something that Christianity has struggled to put words on and failed at providing a final, definitive word. In the forty days three days after his death, Some of Jesus' followers experienced Jesus alive, present, real to them in a way we call "resurrection".

And then, just 10 days ago, an event occurred where Luke begins the Book of Acts. A story that the church calls "Ascension Day" but could just as well be called a Second Good Friday. Jesus stands among his followers and tells them to wait in Jerusalem, to stay together and wait upon a promise. A promise that God's powerful presence, God's Holy Spirit will come upon them. Then Jesus is lifted up into a cloud and disappears out of their sight.

Another bizarre story.

Some of us scratch our heads.

And some roll their eyes.

And some say, I know exactly what this is about. If you have been through a season of deep grief, you know this second grief. The second grief of knowing that your beloved is not coming back.

It has been 10 days now...or 10 years.... or 10,000 years that the disciples have been left looking up with gaping mouths at an empty sky waiting upon a promise.

And then, something happens.

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter stands up and tells the gathered community a story. A story to help them understand what is happening this day.

Peter reminds them of the story of the cross and how Jesus on the cross cried out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Gathering into his cry all the pain and loss and loneliness, all the hurt and anguish in our souls and in every soul. The cries of all creation, "God, where are you?!"

And then, to a God who is not there and does not exist, Jesus cries, "Into your hands, I commend my spirit."

Jesus hands himself over to a God who was not there and finds God there.

A God who shows who God is and what God has done and is doing: A God who draws life out of death.

On Pentecost, we celebrate the ongoing work of this God and God's powerful presence of Life that comes to a waiting people one more time. A Power, a Spirit of God's Living Presence that is in us and for us.

We only can see how God draws life out of death, possibility out of times when there is no possibility, by looking back. By looking back on our lives and noting, "Here, here, here, God brought life when I had thought there was no life....Here, at this time, what I thought was the end of the story, is not the end of the story. God has been at work, bringing life out of death in my life."

We only know this by looking back. Confirmation is a time that we mark and make a memory of something for all of us to look back on and remember.

Today we celebrate six ninth graders who have chosen to walk together and remember a story and contemplate their relationship to this story of the Christian faith.

Today, we come together to remind them and each other of the story in which we live, of a God who draws life out of death. Although you are 14 or 15 you already know about the ways of death and how they have touched your life. You have experienced acts of violence, struggled with your own demons, had loved ones hurt and lost to you, had your own life disrupted. We come today to remind them and each other of the story of a God who draws life out of death.

And we come, to lay hands on them and on each other. To bless each other that we might live and share this story of Life alive and among us. As any 14 or 15 year old already knows, the "world", real people sometimes put hands or words on us that are not kind or loving. And so we come, one more time, to show a different way. To do it differently this time. To lay hands of blessing on each other as we pray for the unleashing power of the Holy Spirit, God's presence alive and among us, a God who draws Life out of death.

We lay hands on each other, as we remind each other as a community that we can't do this walk though life alone. We need each other.

Jesus told his disciples to wait together, to be a community of hope together.

Today, some of us are without hope.

But there is not one of us that doesn't need hope.

And so we wait as a community together, wait on a promise and bear witness to a Presence, a God who is drawing life out of death.

Amen.

I am inspired by James Carroll's spiritual autobiography, Practicing Catholic, and the pointed way he describes the death and resurrection of Jesus. See page 299.)

I am reading also Walter Brueggemann's commentary on Genesis in the "Interpretation" Series who notes that "We do not always know the gifts of God in advance but given a perspective of faith, we can in subsequent reflection discern the amazing movement of God in events we had not noticed or which we had assigned to other causes". (p.201)