

HIW

Pentecost 22 May 2016

Acts 2:1-21

John 14: 8-14

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It is a great honor and privilege to be worshipping with you today – as on the day of Pentecost when we hear of the disciples meeting together, I am so grateful to be together with you on this joyful day! It is always a gift to be able to gather together as a truly international body on Pentecost. And know that the humor is not lost on me: on the day we celebrate many languages being spoken and understood, I find it a bit humorous we gather together to worship in one language! But it's a joy to be able to speak American English with those who speak British English and Irish English and German English and Nigerian and Ghanaian English all to worship the Living God!

Pentecost takes on a more profound meaning having moved to a country where they speak a language other than my native language. I can imagine what the people of Pentecost felt like – absolutely amazed when they heard people speaking in languages they could understand! Perhaps you have experienced it too - walking around Hannover or perhaps sitting in a restaurant or waiting in line and suddenly you hear English being spoken (or, perhaps, German while you were traveling for those native German speakers)! And you can understand what they're saying! Or even from one of my first encounters at the international school meeting people for the first time I said to someone, "You must be from somewhere on the east coast!" And sure enough they were from New Jersey. Not only could I pick up the English, but I could specify the location of the English.

It is a beautiful image and symbol of God's goodness to welcome these children to God's family through baptism today on this day of Pentecost. The waters of baptism are a visible image of God transforming nations once again into one family as kids are blessed by these waters. Of course these waters are a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, but I also imagine them to be the waters of life Jesus promised to us - those springs of living water that are to well up in our souls. As I prepared for this day I was thinking about what we teach our kids about Pentecost and the first reminder I had comes from the Greek. In Greek, the word for Spirit used here on Pentecost is *parakleto* – meaning someone who comes along side of another and that seemed like a wonderful image to me! The Spirit of Pentecost enables us to come along side of one another on this day. People from many nations, old and young together, new families to Germany with those who have been here awhile, living and worshipping one Lord together. It is only the Spirit of God that enables us to come alongside one another in such a beautiful way. But I was also thinking about the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and it reminded me of an encounter I had when I was much younger so I invite you to come along with me on a journey of remembering.

Come with me, back to my early adulthood to the land Down Under, to Melbourne Australia. I was 18 years old and had done an un-American thing and decided to take a gap year between high school and college. I applied to Youth With A Mission to do their discipleship training school that is a combination of three months of class work and three months of mission work. Youth With A Mission is a para-church mission organization that trains young adults in Christian formation and mission work. They have bases around the world and I was grateful to have been accepted to the school in Melbourne.

I was in a class of around forty people from around the world and we became close as we spent each day in class with one another, lived in the same dormitory as one another, and worked at our various jobs for the community with one another. I came to trust my classmates and, in fact, I am still friends with some of them after all these years. Each week we would study a new subject of the Christian faith and late in our three months of training we had a pastor come in for three nights one week to give some teaching on the Holy Spirit. Like most of the subjects I was learning about I was excited to learn more, soak in the perspective and knowledge from a leader in the church, and expand my understanding of God's work in the world. However, I wasn't fully prepared for what the last night of teaching would bring!

You see, I was brought up in what we consider a mainline Protestant church in the United States. The Reformed Church in America has a deep and abiding tradition in the U.S. and takes its roots from the Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands. We in the Reformed Church love God deeply and believe in the Trinity so therefore believe in the Holy Spirit, but we don't place much emphasis on the outpouring of the Spirit per se that you might find in other Christian traditions. The Reformed Church believes in doing things decently and in order.

So here I am, a daughter of the Reformed Church in America from Michigan learning about the Holy Spirit from a pastor in Melbourne, Australia. The third night of our class the pastor decided that he would like to hold a time of prayer and said he felt moved to pray for some of my classmates specifically and invited them to the front of the room. As he started to pray he laid hands on the heads of my classmates and I heard some commotion so opened my eyes. One of my classmates who was being prayed for had fallen over at the front of the classroom. The pastor, of course, reassured us that everything was OK and that our friend had simply been slain in the Spirit. It happened again to the person he prayed for next. And again. In total I think seven of my classmates were knocked over by the Spirit during that night of prayer.

My response to this, however, was to panic. I was overwhelmed by what I was witnessing and couldn't comprehend what was taking place before my eyes. I left the building and started walking the neighborhood deep in prayer with God. I asked God over and over again what was happening. Was it really happening to my friends in the class or were they just faking it? Did the pastor try to manipulate them? I trusted my classmates, were they being dishonest with the rest of us in class? All of these questions were swirling around in my mind and my heart when I felt God ask of me, "Don't you believe my Spirit can move in powerful ways?"

Don't you believe the Spirit can move in powerful ways? That night as I walked and wrestled with God I recalled the story of Pentecost and the words of

Luke: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting." The winds of Pentecost moved in powerful ways and the Spirit came to dance and dwell within the disciples. If I am a follower of Christ that means I too am a child of the Pentecost. God promised to pour out his Spirit on all people, to leave with us one to be our Counselor and Advisor. Listen to these words of Christian writer Rachel Held Evans:

"The Spirit is like wind, earth's oldest sojourner, which in one place readies a sail, in another whittles a rock, in another commands the trees to bow, in another gently lifts a bridal veil. Wind knows no perimeter. The wildest of all wild things, it travels to every corner of a cornerless world and amplifies the atmosphere. It smells like honeysuckle, curry, smoke, sea. It feels like a kiss, a breath, a burn, a sting. It can whisper or whistle or roar, bend and break and inflate. It can be harnessed, but never stopped or contained; its effects observed while its essence remains unseen... We are born into a windy world, where the Spirit is steady as a breeze and as strong as a hurricane. There is no city, no village, no wilderness where you cannot find it." My hope is that these baptismal children will be carried along by these winds of the Spirit for the rest of their lives.

You see, we in mainline denominations and perhaps we as 21st century people have grown cynical of anything that becomes too emotional or we doubt anything that shows evidence of God moving in our lives. We as post-modern, technologically reliant people have lost our trust that God might just actually exist or care for us or have the capacity to produce miracles yet in this day and age. Trust me, I don't want to get carried away because I have known too many cases of people who have denied medical care and simply attempted to pray their cancer away. Or those who have rejected medical treatment for their child trusting God for the cure. I'm not espousing that. What I am asking of you is the same question God asked of me, do you believe God can move in powerful ways?

I believe God might be calling some of us to be filled once again with the Holy Spirit. To join the party of God's goodness. That's why I wear my dancing shoes every Pentecost, as a reminder to myself that God's Spirit is promised to me and will fill me with life! There are some of us who are like the big brother of the Prodigal Son, refusing to join the party. Perhaps there are some of us who need to set our cynicism and skepticism down and remind ourselves that God can do powerful things and has invited us to a feast!

Second, I believe God is also calling us to yield our lives in humility. In John chapter 14 Jesus states that whatever we ask for in his name he will do it. For children, this verse sounds like a free pass in a candy store! But if we are to ask for things of God in the name of Jesus we must also ask in the *spirit* of Jesus who in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed, "not my will, but your will be done." If we are to be filled once again by the pouring out of God's spirit in our lives we must yield our sense that we control our lives. Philip's question at the beginning of this passage has a sense of seeking: "Lord, *show* us the Father and that will be enough for us." And Jesus' response is "here I am." What we see in Jesus is what God is like. Full of compassion and the forgiveness of sins, performing miracles of healing and transformation, yet at the end of his ministry he prays with tears "not my will but yours be done."

Because we confess it every time we meet don't we? And we confessed it once again in our moments of baptism. We say using the Apostles Creed "I believe in the Holy Spirit." This Spirit that enables us to meet together as Church. This Spirit that speaks the language of our hearts as God reminds us again and again that our sins are forgiven. This Spirit that echoes the words of the life and mission of the saints before us to preach the Good News of Christ. This Spirit that leads us into life everlasting.

Friends of God, the Spirit of Pentecost moves in powerful ways and is promised to us to fill our lives with the life of God. Let us open our hearts and our lives once again to this Spirit, yield to God's will, so that our lives might be a powerful example to these young ones who have joined our family today. As God's wind moved over the face of creation in Genesis, may those winds of creation move in our lives to create something powerful for the world today.