

June 4, 2017

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Message: In the Midst of Messiness

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For thirty years I played competitive softball. Over all those years, I can remember playing in all sorts of conditions. Searing heat and humidity. Frigid cold. Rain. Under rainbows. I especially remember the wind...and the sand. I always played infield, and I can remember standing there, ready for the next pitch, when a massive gust of wind would whip up and all of a sudden we'd be sand blasted. All you could do was turn your back on the rush of wind and sand, trying to keep the grit from hitting your face and getting in your eyes.

That wind got your attention! It pales, though, in comparison to the sort of scene that is described by Luke in the Book of Acts. A violent wind. Tongues of flames. Galilean fishermen and skilled workers talking and speaking, or at least being heard, in a multitude of different languages. A crazy scene! In Luke's version, the Holy Spirit arrived in a wild display of windy power, as compared to John's version, where it was a quieter moment, as Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples.

At any rate, the common denominator is the wind. The Pneuma. The Spirit. God's Spirit that moves and enters. Encourages and shakes things up. Rests inside of us, but moves us to *be* as people of God. Around the world today churches are celebrating Pentecost. This ancient event that was born and transformed from an even more ancient, Jewish celebration...Shavuot. This is the Jewish festival that celebrates both the harvest...but even more significantly, the giving of the Torah, God's Law, to the God's people at Sinai.

For the Christian church, that first Pentecost after Jesus' Resurrection changed the significance of the day from one centered on legalism. Many churches today are celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples. Many are celebrating the birthday of the church. Some will even have Happy Birthday cakes to share following the service. Many, like us, have decorated the sanctuary in red. Some of us decorate ourselves in red. We sing songs and put Pentecost imagery on the bulletin covers. While it doesn't necessarily have the fanfare of Easter and Christmas services, Pentecost is a significant day in the life of the church.

For me, though - especially this year - Pentecost represents something deeper than just our trappings and focus on this Sunday of the church calendar. It is something more than a service that recognizes that *new thing* that happened a long time ago. The problem is, when Pentecost becomes just a tidy conclusion to a two thousand year old story; or just another worship service centered around something that happened a long, long time ago, it loses its ability to speak to us today. Right now.

I have heard a variety of different thoughts and ideas these past few years on how God interacts with us...even how God *exists* and *is*. Needless to say, you all don't see and understand even this theological concept eye to eye. But here's the thing that I've noticed. There is a consistent awareness in people of faith that, in some way, God is at work inside of

us. And it is that work inside of us that both connects us and makes us unique. It is also that work that, if we are attuned to it and open to it...moves us.

Being a follower of Christ isn't simply formulaic. It's not simply, "Say these six words and the rest of your life will turn out OK." Being a follower of Christ means opening ourselves to the presence of the Spirit of God inside of us, and allowing God to be at work in us. Pentecost dares us to ask the question, "How is the Spirit moving in me right now? How will I respond?"

One thing we notice about Luke's version of Pentecost. God didn't wait around for the disciples to perfect themselves. They weren't asked to study rhetoric, become multi-lingual, learn about other cultures, get educated, before the Spirit began its work. They were just asked to wait, which they did, then go...which they also did.

Note in the story, too, that the wind surrounded everyone all at once. Yet, the dancing flames rested on each person individually. Despite any reluctance, confusion, self-doubt...regardless of any messiness in their lives, the wind drew them together as a Body, and the flames marked each individually for doing the work of God.

The gift of Pentecost is that God meets us right where we are...right in the midst of our messiness. In the midst of our experiences, our questions, our doubts, our self-doubts, our confusion, our misguided surety about things. God meets us, and sometimes God calls us into our own NEW THING, and says "Go."

And that's where we are today. You're beginning a new thing. I'm beginning a new thing. And while, for me at least, this is a difficult day, still I am excited. I am excited because I know that God is at work in you. And God is at work in me. And neither of us can accurately say what is in store, but we can trust that it will be good. Because goodness is the way of God.

This Day of Pentecost calls us to keep watch - to imagine what a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit will look like in our lives. Of course, if we sit and wait for the same old thing to happen, we'll always get what we ask for. But if we allow ourselves to imagine something new, something fresh, something holy, then anything is possible.

Let us pray. Magnificent God, you are never still, never complacent. Neither must we be. We place our trust in you for our collective futures. We ask you to lead us, as we take the next steps, and in all our steps, may we honor you.