

## “My Flesh Will Live in Hope”

Acts 2: 1-26

“Fellow Disciples, listen carefully to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited to you by God. His miracles, works, and signs that God did through him are common knowledge. This Jesus, following the deliberate and well-thought out plan of our God, a plan not to change God’s mind about humanity but rather a plan to change humanity’s mind about God, this Jesus was betrayed by people, people who took the law into their own hands and turned him over to be treated as a common criminal. Then do you know what they did....they pinned him to a cross and killed him. But God...God would not let this be the last word. God untied the death ropes and raised him up. Death was no match for our God.

We know these words to be true because of the promise given to our ancestors, ancestors who experienced the power of our God as God lead them to freedom, ancestors who watched our God raise them from oppression to freedom. We know these words to be true because of a promise given to our ancestor, David as he stood before giants and kings. And through it all, God remained faithful. David celebrated the gift of God’s Spirit as it was poured out over all of God’s people. As he experienced this gift of God’s Spirit in his own life, he prayed these words...I see the Lord before me for all time for he is at my right hand so that I

will not be shaken, therefore my heart, my heart forever will be glad, and with my mouth, with my hands I will rejoice always because now I know...because of your Spirit, O Holy God, my flesh, my body will live in hope now and forevermore”.

Pretty great way to start a sermon, right? But in no way can I take credit for these words. These are Peter’s words, words which he shared with those gathered on that first morning of Pentecost all those years ago. Words given to a group of people who were struggling, struggling to retain the boldness of witness after so much time had passed since that first Easter morning. Peter offered these words to a group of people who lived day in and day out in a world filled with such depths of hurt and hate that they often wondered if their faith mattered, that if their acts of justice, if their acts of mercy, if their acts of peace even made a difference because more often than not, these acts seemed like small pebbles dropped into a vast ocean, barely making a ripple as they hit the water’s surface.

Yet...as Peter stood before those gathered there on that first Pentecost morning, offering these words, he inspired a movement of wholeness which moved beyond Jerusalem, which moved beyond the Middle East, which eventually moved across every continent across the globe, spreading the Word of God for all of God’s people. As the Gospel message became embodied in communities, as the

Gospel message became embodied in our own communities, it transformed everything. It showed the people of God there was a different way to be, a way of love, a way of peace, a way of justice. On that first Pentecost, all those years ago, as Peter stood before a group of uncertain, worried, yet faithful disciples, he offered these words, and gave them hope....

He did this by reminding them of the promises given to their ancestors by a God who loves them more than they could imagine. He challenged them to go out into their communities so that this world would know, that no matter what, death and despair, hate and hurt, would not have the last word. On that first Pentecost morning, Peter offered these words to a group of disciples, empowering them to become the Body of Christ here on Earth so that the flesh of God's people would forevermore live in hope.

And we missed it all. Not because we were not there in the upper room on that first Pentecost morning. No we missed Peter's inspiring speech because we chose to listen to only part of the story. We chose to listen only to the part of the story which allows us to remain safe and comfortable in our pews and in our church buildings. We chose to listen only to part of the story that allows us to ignore the systems which continue to oppress and divide. As people of faith, as disciples of Christ, we chose and continue to choose to listen to only part of the

story and we miss out on so much because we choose to ignore the power of the Holy Spirit, moving among the chaos, bringing forth new life once more.

But who could blame us, right? Peter's speech is a lot to take in what with all that talk about pouring out God's Spirit upon the people of God, what with all that talk about our sons and daughters prophesying, what with all that talk about young men seeing visions and old men dreaming dreams. Peter gives us enough to deal with in the first part of his speech...so much so that, we can barely wrap our minds around it. It makes us so uncomfortable. It brings up endless possibilities and big dreams. The first part of Peter's speech is so much to taken in that who really needs that second part?

Well, we do actually. As people who live in a world filled with hurt and hate, as people who often wonder if our faith even matters, as followers of Jesus who are struggling because it has been so long since that first Easter morning, we desperately need the second part of Peter's speech. Otherwise, all that talk about dreaming dreams and prophesying is too intimidating. It is too frightening. It is too overwhelming for us. As disciples of Christ, we desperately need the second part of Peter's speech because too many times when confronted with the pain of this world, instead of becoming the people God created and calls us to be, we simply give up and lose all hope.

That's why Peter's words to the disciples that morning are so important. They help us define the world in which we live. They help us define the world in which we want to live because they point beyond Peter, they point beyond those gathered in the upper room, they point beyond even us. Peter's words point to a God who keeps God's promises. They point to a God who is at work in this world. They point to a God who has been at work in this world since the beginning of time, bringing about the Kingdom of God here on Earth.

Peter's words on that first Pentecost morning point to a God who was with our ancestors as they made their way across the Red Sea and began their journey to freedom. Peter's words point to a God who called a freed man named Alexander Campbell and his wife Rosa to serve as ministers to a church for African Americans in a time when slavery was the way of life. Peter's words point to a God who sees the image of God in the orphans and widows. They point to a God who sees the image of God in the ones who are pushed to the margins, and charges a community of faith to welcome them as God has welcomed us.

As people of faith, as modern day disciples, in order for us to have the courage and the strength to dream dreams and prophesy about the coming of God's Kingdom, we need to always remember the promises given to our ancestors, given to us by our God. Otherwise, our dreams and visions will simply become empty words. If our dreams and visions are not grounded in the narrative of how God has

been at work in this world since the beginning of time, bringing about healing and wholeness for all of God's people, they lose their power to inspire. They lose their power to offer hope.

It is not enough for us to be filled with imaginations and visions of the Kingdom of God if we do not name the larger narrative of the empty tomb and the gift of new life. It is not enough to celebrate the birth of the church if we are not empowered to leave our pews and go out beyond our doors into our communities and connect with others. It is not enough to speak words of justice and mercy on Sunday mornings if our actions do not match them every single day.

Peter's words point to the Gospel message of God's abundant grace and love for all of God's children. These words of healing and wholeness are what bring us together as the Body of Christ here on earth. These words of promise are what inspire all our hands, all our hearts, all our flesh to live in hope now and forevermore.

You see, Peter could have easily let the coming of the Spirit be a feel good moment, a moment where everyone stands up, holds hands, sings Kum Ba Ya, and then goes home. But instead he speaks up. Instead he speaks out. And the ironic thing is that what promotes Peter to speak out that morning was someone accused the group of being drunk at nine in the morning. Someone accused the group of

breaking social norms. Someone accused the group of stirring up trouble. Someone accused the group of disciples that morning of making waves in the ocean of the status quo, telling those gathered there that they should just leave things alone....But Peter knew better.

He knew that something was happening in that moment. He knew something was changing in that moment. Peter knew that the Spirit of God was ushering in a new creation and it was going to transform everything.

Peter could have easily ignored the accusations and gone on about his business but...but this accusation served as a cue for Peter, a cue for the disciples, to speak up, to speak out and say once more that this world will not have the last world, that we are the Body of Christ here on Earth. We are mothers of courage, and fathers of time. We are daughters of dust and sons of great vision. We are sisters of mercy and brothers of love. We are seekers of truth and makers of peace. We are the breath of our ancestors. We are the keepers of faith. We are the people who know God's grace and God's loves but more importantly...We are the Spirit of God, moving in and among the chaos, bringing forth new life for all of God's people once more.

Or let me say it this way....I have been dreading this sermon for the last month and half, ever since my doctoral defense in April. One of the things I lifted

up in my Dmin paper was the two different narratives about the connection between Midway Christian Church and Historic Second Christian Church. And of course, that was one of the things my readers latched on to. They asked me some very difficult questions about the two different narratives. But one has stayed with me, going around and around in my head as we made preparations for this Sunday's combined service between our two churches....that question being.... "Knowing the history of these two churches, knowing the connection between these two churches, how do you see the two churches coming together on Pentecost making a difference in your community and is there a possibility of reconciling these two stories? I'll say that again: .... "Knowing the history of these two churches, knowing the connection between these two churches, how do you see the two churches coming together on Pentecost making a difference in your community and is there a possibility of reconciling these two stories?"

I must have answered something because they moved on to the next question. But I know that my answer to this question was inadequate that day. And I also know that my answer to this question remains inadequate still today. However, this question is one that I believe we can no longer ignore or brush off simply because it makes us uncomfortable, simply because we can't wrap our minds around how it would all work.

As Midway Christian Church and Historic Second Christian Church, we are called to answer this difficult question. Because it is not enough for us to get together one day a year and sing Kum Ba Ya and then go home. In this time, and in this space, something is happening. Something is changing in this moment. The Spirit of God is ushering in a new creation and it is going to transform everything and it is time that we get ready for the new life that it will bring.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to recognize that even in our own community, we are choosing to listen to only part of the story and we are missing out on the Spirit of God, moving among us, challenging us, empowering us to become the people that God created and calls us to be.

Together, we are the Body of Christ here on Earth. We are mothers of courage, and fathers of time. We are daughters of dust and sons of great vision. We are sisters of mercy and brothers of love. We are seekers of truth and makers of peace. We are the breath of ancestors. We are the keepers of faith. We are the people who know God's grace and God's loves. But more importantly, we are the Spirit of God, moving in and among the chaos, bringing forth new life for all of God's people once more. May it be so. Amen.