

“The Coming of the Holy Spirit”

Acts 2: 1-21

I have a confession to make. I don't quite get Pentecost. It seems like every year, I am missing something about this day. Every year, it is the same text, the same story, the same theme and every year, I just don't get it. Sure, I know it is the church's birthday. Sure I know we are supposed to wear red. Sure I know that it is a holy day in the life of the church. But for some reason, each and every year, I just didn't get Pentecost that is until this year.

Before this year, I had always assumed that the story of Pentecost was all about the disciples who had this amazing earth shattering wind blowing experience. Before this year, I had always assumed that it was just a story about the disciples who had this life changing moment but not so. This year, I finally began to see the bigger picture surrounding the Pentecost story. This year, I realized that Pentecost isn't just for us the disciples. It is also for all those people standing on the outside of the church as well. Suddenly I realized, Pentecost was and is also for all those who have never heard a word about God's mighty works, who have never heard about God's grace. Pentecost is really for all of God's children. It is a story that speaks to us church going folk as well as being a word for those who have never ever heard about or experienced God's love. This story, the Pentecost story,

the story about our beginning as the Body of Christ here on earth is a word of grace, a word of love, a word of promise meant for all of God's children. Suddenly this year, I realized that Pentecost is really an invitation for all us, church going or not, for all of us who need to know that God can and does speak our own language!

I invite you to turn in your pew Bibles to Acts 2: 1-21. I'll be reading from the Message version. And I invite you to follow along.

(Read Text)

I don't know what is different about me this year but for some reason, as I read this text, I couldn't help but focus on the people gathered together outside of that upper room. This year, when I looked at this text, I couldn't help but see that sure the Holy Spirit came into that upper room first but it didn't stay there. It went out, changing the disciples along the way, getting them to speak the people's language, getting them to use words that others could understand, words that opened people up to God's wondrous works. Sure the Holy Spirit touched the disciples but its main focus on that first Pentecost morning was changing the disciples' focus from inward to outward. Its main focus was changing the disciples' focus from fear to new life.

On that first Pentecost morning, sure, we see the Holy Spirit come in and it go out. But, we also see it prompting the disciples to start speaking so that all of

God's children can understand the amazing life changing nature of God's grace and love, to start speaking so that all can experience God's welcome.

I don't know what the difference is but this year, as I read this text, my attention was not drawn to the disciples, the supposed insiders. No, my attention was drawn to the ones standing on the outside, standing in amazement, standing in wonder, all because maybe for the first time, they were hearing about and experiencing God's wondrous works in languages, in words that they could understand, words that touched their hearts, words that changed their lives

The people on the outside, people apart from the inner circle, were hearing about God's love, hearing about God's grace maybe for the first time. They were hearing about God's wondrous works without judgment, without guilt. The people on the outside, not just the disciples, not just the inner circle, were experiencing the life changing nature of the Holy Spirit. And they were experiencing it all without being told that they had to change everything about themselves to fit in.

I don't know what the difference is about this time but for some reason, when I read this text, it wasn't the supposed insiders that caught my attention. It was the others...the supposed outsiders, separated by walls, walls built to keep them out, outsiders who were told for the first time that they were a beloved child of God, no ifs and or buts. That for the first time, they were being told that they were loved more than they could ever imagine, without ever having to change a

thing about themselves to be accepted. All because the Holy Spirit came and began to change the way the disciples talked about the wondrous works of God.

Now please don't hear me say that we as the church need to completely change who we are. I'm not saying that at all. If we did, we wouldn't be who God created us to be. Our very actions, our very words would be false and not authentic. People would see right through us and become even more cynical about the church. People would begin to doubt us even more; they would wonder if they could trust what we were saying. If we changed who we are, People would begin not to believe in the amazing news that we share, all because we were not being true to ourselves. No, we don't need to change who we are and we certainly don't need to begin speaking in the way of the world to make people understand about the Kingdom of God. Because for one thing, the way of the world is not the way of God's Kingdom. The world uses words like power and greed. It uses words like hurt and violence. It uses words that are not even supposed to be in our vocabulary as the church. No We, as the church, as the Body of Christ, are not called to speak in the way of the world. We are called to use words like grace and love. We are called to use words like peace and reconciliation in all that we do as God's people, words that this world doesn't or can't or won't understand, words that simply are not in the world's vocabulary.

No, please hear that I'm not saying that we should change who we are as the church to make the people understand us or even like us. What I am saying is that maybe it is time for us to reframe how we share our message, how we share the good news a bit. Maybe it is time we go from so much inward focus to focusing outward. Maybe it is time we stop focusing so much on me and us and we start focusing on all of God's children.

Maybe it is time for us as the church to stop focusing on words like salvation and sin, words that are vague, words that can be used to separate us into who is out and who is in. Maybe we should begin to start really discovering the vocabulary of the Kingdom of God and to start using words like grace, hope, peace and love in all of our interactions with the people we encounter.

Because, let's face it, As a church, we are awfully good at inward focus sometimes. There have been times over the years when all we did was sit around talking about atonement theory, and transubstantiation. As a church, there have been times over the years when all we did was sit around talking about lectionary and liturgy. And as much as we hate to admit it, there have been times over the years and still continues to be times that as a church all we do is sit around talking about who is in and who is out. Let's be honest, we been doing this kind of talking for two thousand years. We've gotten good at it and unfortunately, it is this type of talk that we have become known for as the church. Nowadays, the Church is

known more for hurting people and becoming divided over the issues rather than speaking words of love and grace to all and for all. So maybe it is time we take a hard look at ourselves and the message that we are sharing. Maybe it is time for us to wake up and realize that what we are saying isn't connecting with the people on the outside. Maybe it is time for us to wake up and realize that what we are saying is hurting the people on the outside, and let's face it, it is hurting the people on the inside as well.

As a church, Maybe it is beyond time that we wake up and realize that the Holy Spirit is coming in and it is saying it will have none of our fearful life draining behavior. Maybe it is beyond time that we as the church, as the Body of Christ wake up and realize that the Holy Spirit is prompting us to speak in words of love, to speak in words of grace so that all of God's children can understand and experience God's wondrous works.

Now is the time for us as the Body of Christ to start living out our calling as Jesus' disciples here on earth. Now is the time to start sharing the good news with rest of the world, a world that is in need of hearing that it is welcomed, that it is loved. Now is the time for us to start saying in words, in actions, so that all the people can understand that they are embraced as children of God. Now is the time to change our focus from inside out. And thankfully under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we can do just that.

That's what so amazing about this story. It is not just about the church. It is not just about the disciple sitting in the upper room. This story is about all of God's children, the ones that have heard about God's wondrous works and those who have not. It is a story that shares the message of God's Kingdom. It reminds us that God is doing a new thing. It is a story that says ultimately life is all about God's unconditional grace and love.

Sure, The story starts out with the disciples sitting in the upper room, but it doesn't end there. In this text, we are told that the disciples are in the upper room and they are trying to figure out what their next steps will be which means trying to figure out who is in charge. So the disciples begin to talk. And soon the talk about their amazing experience with resurrection becomes a conversation about who is going to take out the trash. Soon The talk about the unifying experience of breaking bread with one another becomes a conversation about what color to paint the parlor bathroom. Soon All their talk about the life changing moments that they had with Jesus are forgotten. And as soon as they begin to do this, the disciples begin to lose focus on what their calling as Jesus' disciples here on earth was really all about.

suddenly, there comes a mighty wind, rushing in, and begins to shake things up. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit comes in and reminds the disciples what they are called to do here on earth as Jesus' disciples. It gives them a new language. It gives

them new words. The Holy Spirit comes in and changes the disciples' focus from their group, from their own wants and needs to getting them to focus on speaking out, loud and proud, about God's wondrous works. It gives the disciples the words that tell about God's grace and God's love so that all of God's children could understand and experience God's wondrous works.

On that first Pentecost morning, The Holy Spirit comes in and changes the disciples' focus from inward to outward focus just like it is doing for us today. Pentecost is about reclaiming our calling as Jesus' disciples, as the Body of Christ here on earth, our calling to talk to anyone who is seeking to know, to talk to anyone who wants to understand, to talk to anyone who wants to experience God's love and God's grace in their loves. Pentecost is about reminding us that we as Jesus' disciples are called to speak so that all of God's children can understand, so that all of God's children will experience, so that all of God's children will hear that they are welcomed and embraced as God's own, no ifs, ands or buts.

That's what it is all about. That's why we are here. That is why we read the same text year after year. To open ourselves to the Spirit's prompting. To remind ourselves that it is beyond time that we as the Body of Christ here on earth speak out, loud and proud, so that all of God's children understand and experience the realization that we are loved more than we could ever imagine.

That's what being Jesus' disciple is all about. That's why we come to church each and every week. We don't come to church because we like the color of the bathroom walls in our churches. We don't come to church because the food is good at our potlucks. Okay, well, that may be partly true, especially when it comes to Mrs. CoEmma's butterscotch pies.

As we celebrate Pentecost this year, we are reminded that We come to church because someone at some point, told us about God's love in words that we could understand. We are here today, part of the Body of Christ, because someone at some point, showed us the grace of God in actions that changed our lives. We are disciples of Christ because we experienced the life changing, the life transforming, the life giving nature of God and we began to understand the blessings that this knowledge brings. We began to understand the joy that this knowledge brings. We are disciples of Christ here today because at some point, someone told us the good news that changed our lives forever.

And now it is beyond time that we start sharing that same news, that same experience, that same joy with all of God's children. Now is the time to speak out loud and proud as the Body of Christ here on earth by using words of grace, using words of love, using words of peace so that all of God's creation understands that we are loved more than we could ever imagine.

Now is the time to speak out loud and proud about God's wondrous works.

May we always find the courage to speak out, loud and proud, about God's wondrous works, to follow the Spirit's prompting and share the good news of God's grace and God's love with all of God's children, even using words when necessary. Amen.