

Acts 2:1-21

I Will Pour Out My Spirit

Day of Pentecost ~ May 28, 2023 ~ Receiving of New Members ~ Sabbatical Sending

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Communion Meditation

"Let Grandpa pour my syrup!" So implored Ben, our then six-year-old nephew, as he watched my dad lather his stack of pancakes, literally drowning them in that magic, mystical, sweet, smooth taste of heaven known to us mortals as maple syrup. Young boy Ben watched with disbelief and awe. You see, his mom (my sister Wendy) and dad were *extremely* careful about limiting their sons' sugar intake. If he was lucky, Wendy would dribble out one, maybe two teaspoonfuls, max! So, when Ben witnessed his grandpa's full pour: so full and fast and furious. Could it be? Yes, it could. Oh yes, "Please, let Grandpa pour *my* syrup."

Perhaps no one was *more* surprised than Peter that day in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit poured out upon all who had gathered--so full and fast and furious. Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus had told his disciples, "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5) But when and where would it happen? And how would they know? Their answer to these questions came this day, as told by Luke in Acts 2. We do not have words to describe this experience. You can hear the gap between the experience and the words in our text: "something *like* the rush of a violent wind.... divided tongues *as of fire*, appeared." How do you describe the indescribable? Think for a moment about your most intense, most surprising and out of this world, ecstatic moments. They cannot be contained with words.

Nor do we expect the unexpected on any given Sunday. Especially not Presbyterians. We like our bulletins that tell us what's going to happen. They help us know what to expect. Kind of like the Jews who had gathered from every nation, to observe *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks, or Feast of Harvest, fifty days after Passover. That's why it was called Pentecost in Acts 2, which means "fifty" in Greek. It was a traditional holy day in Jewish tradition to celebrate the first fruits of the Spring harvest. Little did they know that would be the day Jesus' promise would be fulfilled, with another kind of fruit. Fruits of the Spirit, made known through Christ, would pour abundantly, lavishly all over those who had gathered.

The sound and fury, the wind and fire got everyone's attention. Smart phones dropping from their hands, looking up... "Wait, what's happening?" Next, even more shocking, more spectacular: it was the Galileans, code for the least educated, the most "backward" (as some might say) Jesus' eleven disciples there that day, were speaking in over fifteen different languages so that everyone in that radically diverse crowd could understand, the message of God's infinite, unconditional love for them in their own language.

Isn't that God for you? I believe God *loves* to surprise and shock us that way. This kind of reversal is God's jam! And I'm guessing that no one was more surprised than Peter. That day he stood with the eleven disciples and was the one to raise his voice to address the bewildered crowd. Only fifty after the worst day of his life. That terrible day that Peter had denied even

knowing Jesus, not once, but three times before the cock crowed. Right when Jesus needed him the most. Simon Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus had said, I will build my church, had crumbled. Had choked, he flinched. He failed as an ally for the one being mocked and shamed. Peter had not stood up for Jesus when he needed him the most. Only 50 days, about seven weeks earlier.

Yet Peter was the *first* to stand and preach in the name of the Risen Christ. He testified "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." (Acts 2:24) Peter, of all people, found the confidence and courage to stand and address this large and intimidating crowd (probably the first time he'd ever done anything like that before), pulling out of his hat, words from the prophet Joel, whose message rang truer than ever that day. Clear as a bell: *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh*: every age, every gender, every culture, every status, and station: all flesh. Did you ever wonder why we welcome newcomers every Sunday morning worship with this message? It's been part of our Christian DNA since the Day of Pentecost. It's at the heart of whom Christ calls us to be.

As I stand here today, preaching from this pulpit on the last Sunday before my sabbatical begins, I see the Holy Spirit pouring power, love, healing, forgiveness, like the way my dad poured syrup on his pancakes. Full and fast. And true to the spirit of Pentecost, the birth story of our Christian faith, I believe this sabbatical summer of 2023 will surprise us. It will amaze and astonish us in good ways. Even in this service, today.

The Holy Spirit has gifted us with five new members to receive! Each one chock full of gifts, talents, and faith, to strengthen and deepen the witness of our FPC church body. We will dedicate the Pentecost offering to pour Holy Spirit power into the lives of children at risk, youth, and young adults. And we will ask God's blessing upon this new thing we will be doing for the next three months. All to the glory of God who promises to save all who call out in any language. Together we can learn to speak God's universal language of love across cultures, across generations, political persuasions, across neurodiversity's, and all the other ways we are so different from another. All the ways we feel so misunderstood. So, broken.

Like Peter, we are all infinitely precious, broken people. That is the bond that we share. One with the other. And with Christ, whose body was broken for you and for me. This Table is Christ's gift, pouring out Christ's spirit to us. This body. This cup. Not just once upon a time. But again, and again. Neither Pentecost nor communion are simply a look back at something amazing that happened once upon a time. They are also about now. The Spirit of Christ poured out today and tomorrow and this summer. Not by the teaspoonful. But fast and furious. And even fun! Open your eyes and ears at the Rummage Sale, the Walking Retreat, our booth on Wenzel Plaza at Pride Day, our youth reporting on their Mission Trip in Tennessee, our children at Vacation Bible School. And every Sunday when other people (not me) stand up in this pulpit. Both new and familiar favorites proclaim God's word to you in new and surprising way.

I feel it in my bones. Do you? Steven Sondheim captured this feeling poetically in the lyrics of his song (music by Leonard Bernstein) "Something's Coming." Mark Nelson chose this as a closing prayer for our Outreach Committee meeting in May. I will also close this meditation with it:

*Could be... Who knows?
There's something due any day—I will know right away,
Soon as it shows.
It may come cannonballing down through the sky,
Gleam in its eye, Bright as a rose.
Who knows?*

*It's only just out of reach,
Down the block, on a beach, under a tree.
I got a feeling there's a miracle due, gonna come true, coming to me!*

*Could it be? Yes, it could. Something's coming, something good.
If I can wait.
Something's coming I don't know what it is, but it is
Gonna be great!ⁱ*

Yes, my friends. This morning. This summer. Something's coming, the Spirit of Christ poured out on us and through us: can you see it? Can we hear it? Can we be it. Yes, I know we can. Amen.

ⁱ "Something's Coming" from *West Side Story*, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Steven Sondheim