

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, June 5, 2022

Acts 2:1-13

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

There are these two young fish swimming along one morning. They happen to pass an older fish swimming in the opposite direction who smiles at them and says, “Morning boys, how’s the water?” The two young fish swim on for a little while until one of them looks at the other and says, “What the hell is water?”

David Foster Wallace told that anecdote as he began a commencement speech at Kenyon College some 15 years ago. He used it as an illustration in a much longer speech that I commend to you entitled “This Is Water.” The purpose of the story it turns out, as simple as perhaps forgettable as it is, is an important message for us humans. It turns out that one of the most difficult yet important tasks of being alive in this world is to stay awake and alive to the world around you.

Like fish it is easy for us to swim through the waters of our day-to-day and neglect what it is that we are navigating together. We might be lulled to sleep by different things going on in our world. We might be tired, weary, unwilling to take up the difficult task of continuing to be awake and alive in this world where God has placed us.

The writer of Acts tells us that there was a time in the early church some 50 days after the resurrection of our Lord when the early followers of Christ were all together in one place. That would be an easy line for us to skip past. Being all together in one place. Yet we remember that even on this day last year, we had roped off every other pew. You had to sign up to come to worship. There was absolutely no way for us to all be together in one place.

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Now we are gifted with technology that allows us to gather from all different places, but there is something about being in a space together if not physically, spiritually together. The early followers of Christ were all together in one place.

Then there's a rush, a violent wind comes upon them, and divided tongues as a fire rests on each of them. Everyone who's gathered. No one's left out. A tongue rests on each of them, and they begin to speak in languages and understand in languages that they do not know. They hear tongues that are not native to them, and yet they can understand them completely, fully. We imagine this day, as we remember the birth of the Church, that that this was a one-time event. So, we gather this day some 2000 years later, and we celebrate the birth of the Church. Then we wonder why this hasn't happened again in the last two millennia.

We expect for Pentecost to look like it did on that first day. They were all gathered in one place. Then it's very likely that we will be lulled to sleep and that we will not recognize the very spirit of God working and moving even now in the Church. If we have as the Church believed the myth that Pentecost was a one-time event, then we will also miss the gospel imperative to see the Spirit of God working and moving in the world to come alive once again.

If we as the Church were to understand that this Pentecost was not something we celebrated millennia ago but is indeed happening even now in our life and in our world, if even now the very spirit, the same spirit, that fell upon the apostles that day, the disciples as well, that same spirit lives and dwells within each of us, perhaps something brand new might be born.

Part of what I think David Foster Wallace was trying to communicate is that the divine spark that dwells within each and every one of us, and indeed the whole world, might be so close to us that we cannot see it on a daily basis. We might get so wrapped up in something that's going on at work or so deep into the trauma that we are experiencing in our lives or in the world, we might get so wrapped up in that small event that's happening right in front of us in our family, that we are unable to step back and gain perspective on the very Spirit of God that still dwells there. Even if it's a still small voice, the flicker of the Divine. I think it's easy for the Church to be lulled to sleep as well, to believe that we dress up at exactly one time a year in red, and we throw a party, instead of recognizing that every time we gather there is the possibility the Spirit making itself known to us. Here's the thing about Pentecost. It was already a holiday.

People of the Jewish tradition already celebrated Pentecost. "This was a normal gathering of the Church" as Joy J Moore would remind us of this week. It's a normal gathering of the Church. They've just come together on a normal day. They're all together in one place, which for them probably seem pretty normal, but for us, perhaps, we're awakened once again to what it means to actually have people in our pews.

It's a normal gathering, and in the midst of that the Spirit comes like the rush of a violent wind and enlivens them once again to God's work in the world. I was thinking about that this week

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and I was reading a little Howard Thurman. This quote came up. "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

I sat with that this week because I think the Church often looks out at the world and tries to diagnose what is it we're supposed to do at this moment as opposed to asking the question what is it that makes us come alive. Because what the world doesn't need is for someone to plug holes in the dam. What the world needs is for people, the Church, to have come alive in a brand new way, to have recognized that the Spirit that fell fresh upon the disciples who were gathered in that place so many years ago dwells within us now and falls fresh even now.

What the world needs is people who have been awakened to that Spirit and have come alive to the work of God in and through them.

Today we're going to get to ordain and install a whole new class of elders. Actually, two classes of elders and two classes of deacons.

If you have served in the church as an officer before, perhaps you have been called upon to meet a need. Perhaps you've been called to a particular ministry, and you did that work faithfully. I believe you did. But I want you to know that my hope for our deacons and our elders this day, is not that they will see themselves diagnosing what is the need of our church, and then going and doing that, instead they will look for what makes them come alive as servants of Christ. What thing is it that makes them want to get up on a Sunday morning or come on a Wednesday evening and makes them come alive in a brand new way. What thing makes them leave this place saying I saw the Spirit of God working and moving and then asking the question that we as the church can ask together when the spirit falls fresh upon us even this day, 'What does this mean?'

It means that God is in the business of making all things brand new, of awakening us, of enlivening us to God's work in the world.

As you're swimming through your week this week, as you're navigating whatever it is that you have to navigate in your family, and your work, and perhaps, even your church life, I hope you'll pass somebody who'll ask you how the water is. I hope it will make you think how God is enlivening you, awakening you, to the world in which we are living now, and how is the Church to be at work in it. That's the Gospel news of Pentecost. It is not our work. It is the Spirit's work through us.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all. Amen.