

May 15-Pentecost

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Acts 2:1-21, 36-42

Galatians 3.23-28

Happy birthday! I hope you all brought your party hats to go with the balloons I brought to celebrate the birth of this disordered thing we call the Church. Pentecost has never really caught on in our culture. I hate to break it to you, but you aren't going to get any extra days off from school or work for Pentecost. You aren't going to travel home for a big Pentecost dinner with your family. There is no countdown of shopping days left until Pentecost. You aren't going to go out into a field and chop down a Pentecost bush, and the children will not go out looking for Pentecost eggs after service. You aren't going to get a card that says Happy Pentecost, or Merry Pentecost, we haven't even figured out what the proper greeting should be, since we so rarely celebrate Pentecost. When it comes to Church holidays that do not have any secularity, when their importance has not made it into the culture, our culture has said when it comes to Pentecost, you can keep it. But the question is, do we really truly want it. When we turn to the second chapter of Acts, we do not find a controlled situation, we do not find the early Church longing for Pentecost. What we find is the Holy Spirit grabbing hold of the Church, we find holy confusion is all over the place. We find the birth of the Church coming amidst disorder and violent rushing winds.

Traditionally the day of Pentecost was celebrated as a pilgrimage holiday for the Jews. Seven weeks after celebrating Passover, when their chains of slavery were broken, they celebrated Pentecost as the day when God made them into a community, when God gave them

the Torah. And as a community, separated by nationality and language, they gathered in Jerusalem, bringing the first fruits of their harvest to the Temple, in a communal offering. When we left the disciples in Acts, at the Ascension, several weeks ago. They were sent on a mission of waiting. Waiting for the Kingdom of God to be fully revealed, while witnessing in Jerusalem, Judea and to the ends of the earth. After leaving the scene of the Ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, gathering into the upper room with some of the women from the movement. And they devoted themselves to prayer. Eventually they got tired of waiting, and Peter stood up among the believers, and said we have always been the twelve, there was that unfortunate thing with Judas, so now we are the eleven. Which really does not have the same ring to it, so we need a replacement. We have a vacant office that needs to be filled, so decently and in order, they formed a nominating committee, to hold an election. By casting lots, Matthias was chosen to be the replacement, the twelfth disciple, and he was promptly never heard from again. No sooner had they finished nominating Matthias, before suddenly a new Pentecost was ushered in with a sound, the sound of a rushing wind, a wind that we are told filled the entire house. A violent wind that threw the order of the way things used to be, into a holy disorder. A wind that blew them out of the upper room, and threw them out of the house into the world that had been waiting for some Good News. A world that needed to hear God's grace spoken to them in a way they could understand. Fire was all over the place, it was resting on each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They started speaking languages that they did not know only a few moments before. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit were they filled with such wonderful gifts, gifts that came to them in disorder, but were able to quiet the confusion of the world.

Since Pentecost was a holiday for pilgrimage, there were Jews gathered in Jerusalem from every nation. When they heard the sound of the violent wind, which blew the disciples out of their upper room they rushed to see what had happened. We are told that they were astonished and amazed, bewildered because each heard their own language being spoken by this collection of strange Galileans. Suddenly the disorder and division that had existed between them was broken down, the events of the Tower of Babel reversed. Each heard the words of the disciples spoken to them as they needed to hear them. They heard the Good News come to them, unencumbered, gathered together with those who were so unlike themselves by the sound of rushing wind. But some, some sneered, some tried to understand what was going on, some tried to rationalize it into something that made sense of this disorder. In an attempt to understand what this confusion meant, they said to one another, they are filled with new wine. And I love Peter's response, after he takes control of the situation, after he gets everyone calmed down, you'll notice, he does not say we are spiritual people we do not partake. What he says is, it's a little early, it's 9 in the morning, give it at least another hour.

Then Peter decided to do a little preaching to this crowd that has gathered, now that he has convinced them that they are not drunk. And it's a pretty good sermon, he has a text he uses the prophet Joel, he demonstrates how Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophesy, he uses David's Psalm as an illustration of what it means to be the Messiah. And Peter finishes strong, proclaiming to the entire house of Israel, those gathered and those abroad, that Jesus who was crucified, is the Lord and Messiah. Peter preaches an ok sermon, it was short and to the point, but there was nothing particularly spectacular about it, aside from pointing to who Christ was, is and continues to be. What is miraculous from this story is that afterwards, the people were cut to the heart, and called out to the apostles asking what they should do. What do we do now that we

know this, now that this has cut right to the center of our hearts, now that we have faith, what do we do now?

Peter told them to come forward for baptism, and miraculously after this ok sermon, three thousand people came forward to be baptized. How does this sermon get three thousand converts? Only the power of the Holy Spirit can do this. It is never really about the sermon, I could stand up here all day but that is not really the point, the point is what the Spirit is doing during my ok, or pretty good sermons. It is what the Spirit chooses to do during the preaching moment, I can try to weave together a decent sermon, I can try to find illustrations that speak to where you are in life, but in the end I have to admit that I am not in control. Every time I climb up to the pulpit to give a pretty ok sermon, like Peter, I have to rely on the Holy Spirit to move, to create holy confusion in your lives, to take the Good News into your heart, so that you are left wondering what do I do now. No matter how carefully I carve the sentences, I stand up here week after week, waiting to see how the Spirit will move in your lives, because I know my sermons aren't moving anyone. I stand up here saying the same things that have been said a million times before by people who are smarter and more eloquent, trusting that the Holy Spirit will violently rush into this space, to push us out of our upper rooms. Every week we gather together, we await to see how the Spirit will work, how the Spirit will speak to your heart in a way that defies culture or language, how the Good News of God's love and grace will defy the boundaries that we think we know, crashing into our lives again and again, creating holy disorder out of the lives we try to plan so carefully.

On this Pentecost we find the creation of a new community, the Jews who gathered from every corner of the earth to celebrate being made into a community around the Torah, have been brought together into community by the Holy Spirit. While they were separated from one another

by nationality, ethnicity and language, they have been brought together by the Good News which speaks to all of our hearts. They have been molded into a community by the Holy Spirit that continually challenged the boundaries that we place on God's grace. As we move through Acts, we will see the Holy Spirit doing this again and again. We will see the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of those we would never expect, coming like a violent wind, pushing us out of the upper room and into the world that is waiting to hear some Good News. Through the Holy Spirit, we are given faith, faith in Christ who brings us all into fellowship with one another. So that even as we look upon the birth of the Church, which is now filled with people from every nation, we may say that there is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no man or woman, because we are all one in Jesus Christ. No matter how we try to divide ourselves, the Holy Spirit just won't let us, it is just no use. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are continually brought together, we continue to experience Pentecost, a violent and holy confusion, bringing us into a community around God's grace.

The text goes on to tell us that after they were baptized these three thousand people devoted themselves to learning, fellowship and prayer. This congregation went from 120 earlier that day, to three thousand. And while they may have devoted themselves to learning, prayer and fellowship, I guarantee you that some of them were not sweet and pleasant people. Aside from all of the cultural differences, the language barriers that divided them, some of them had to be real jerks, it's just that now they are Christian jerks, and we are expected to love them. Within days, the Church has already become a mess. There is wind blowing people everywhere, there is fire that no one can control, people from different nationalities all in the same congregation together. Right from the get go, Romans, Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Arabs, they're all in the Church now. We've got people who are difficult and people who are wonderful, young people

and old people, wealthy people and poor people who are going to need to be cared for, people who were enemies, sinners and Mary the mother of Jesus, all just trying to be the Church. What do you call such a mess, such a disordered group? You call it the Spirit filled Church. Holy confusion has always been the way that the Church has found its life. Even when it does not fit into your strategic plan, the Holy Spirit will continue to rush into our lives and into this congregation, and that is Good News.