

## Scripture

Since Easter, we've been talking about God's love being loose in the world. We've studied stories in Acts and Galatians about the ways in which the Spirit of God worked, drawing the circle of community and inclusion wider to encompass the ones who had always been on the outside. Today, we are backing up a little bit to the beginning of Acts, to the story of when the Holy Spirit made herself known to the early followers of Jesus. It's a great story. This is Acts 2: 1-13:

**2** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** 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. **3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

**5** Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **7** Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? **11**...in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." **12** All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

## Sermon

Who are these "others," these sneerers who assume the only explanation for really cool stuff happening is wine? Whoever they are, they don't seem like much fun. They seem like the kind of people who, given the choice will always choose whatever is least fun. Let's not be those people today. Let's choose fun. Because the Pentecost story is made for fun. It's loud, with it's rushing wind and people talking at the same time. It's colorful, with it's description of flames dancing in the air. All of it is filled with mystery and begs us to use our imaginations.

The first super fun thing about this story is that "they were all together in one place." Having just spent the last year and a quarter the opposite of "all in one place," being together is especially fun. The pandemic has taught us to appreciate being in the same room with other humans, reading their body language, making eye contact, and hearing the sound of real people laughing together. It is glorious! It is much better than the awkward Zoom meetings that have come to be so much

a part of our days. Over Zoom, we can't tell who the person is looking at when they roll their eyes and we aren't sure if anyone is truly laughing at our cheesy, dad jokes or if they are putting on a good show for the video and texting other people in the meeting about how awkward we are. "All in one place" is definitely more fun.

Those early followers of Jesus were all together in one place when mysterious things started happening. In the biblical narrative, both wind and fire signaled the divine presence, and this story has both, so it's a double dose of fun. God made Godself known in a BIG way. The text doesn't actually say the people were having fun, but we are allowed to imagine it. They had been through so much. The Jewish Festival of Pentecost was fifty days from Passover. In Luke's story (remember, the author of the Gospel of Luke also wrote Acts), since Passover, Jesus had been arrested, put on trial, crucified, his body placed in a tomb, and there had been an empty tomb. The disciples had encountered the resurrected Jesus, who promised them they would receive the Holy Spirit in his absence and then Jesus disappeared into a cloud. It was a lot.

On that day, together, they were experiencing something new, something unexplainable, maybe even miraculous. They were able to speak in languages they did not previously know. I can tell you, in seminary, if I had suddenly been able to speak Hebrew, that truly would have been fun...I think Rev. Hubbard would agree with that. We were in the same Hebrew language classes. They almost killed us both. Or what about to be somewhere fabulous on vacation and suddenly be able to speak the language of that land, to order exactly what you want in a restaurant or get directions to the very best warm, sunny beach. Being understood, being able to understand, it's not Disney World fun, but it feels really good.

When the wind and the dancing flaming things appeared, Jesus' followers knew what had just happened. That thing Jesus had promised them would happen had happened! The Holy Spirit was there...God was there with them, they could see, hear, and feel God's presence. That must have been what they were talking about in all those different languages. "Hey, listen to us! Look what God can do! God is doing something new, bringing all of us together, helping us understand one another. Imagine what we can do now!" After this initial burst of excitement with the special effects and the hope found in understanding and being understood,

Peter gave perhaps the most important sermon of his life and the Church ) with a capital C was off and running. This, friends, is why Pentecost in the Christian tradition is called, the birthday of the Church. Happy birthday, Church!

### **Sing Happy Birthday!**

Here we are today...all together in one place, whether you are here in-person or online, we all lit some candles and declared them symbols of God's presence wherever we are. I wonder if the Spirit of God among us today might help us understand one another better and I wonder if she might inspire us to let our imaginations run wild, thinking about what we can create together. Like the beginning of the Church more than 2000 years ago, we are beginning again today as well. The pandemic, in so many ways, has given us a chance for a fresh start, a new beginning.

One of my favorite beginnings is the beginning signaled by the sunrise. Don't misunderstand...I would not call myself a morning person, but I do love a sunrise on a sandy beach. On vacations, I have been known to get up and watch the sunrise and then go back to bed because...well, vacation. Sunrises begin the day with awe-inspiring beauty and as that first light hits the horizon and it creeps up into the sky, it is a beautiful reminder that the day ahead is full of possibilities that I can't quite see yet, but I trust they are there.

To be honest, though, most of the time I plow right into my day, maybe you do too, without taking even a moment to consider, to imagine, the possibilities before us, to imagine what the Holy Spirit might be up to that day. And it's okay if the idea of the Holy Spirit is a little too mysterious for you. The truth is, no matter who you are or what you believe about God and how God works in the world, each day begins the same way for all of us, full of possibilities. Wait...How does each day begin? FULL OF POSSIBILITIES! Each day brings us another chance to build bridges and not walls, to love ourselves and each other, speaking a language of love and inclusion that speaks to the tired and battered souls of our neighbors.

And this isn't just true for us as individuals, it is true for us as a church. I believe the sun has risen on a brand-new day for the Church, not just this church, but all churches. I can't speak for all churches, but as a leader of this one, this new day has my attention. In the last 15 months, we have been shown that church must

be about more than a building. Church must be more than a bunch of ancient stories and recited prayers. Church must be about more than which songs we sing or the communion wafers we use (yes, we know the news ones are a bit Styrofoam-y). Church must be about sharing God's love with a hurting world in ways the ones who are hurting can understand, in ways that say, "Welcome, you belong here, you belong to God."

So, first, we are going to change the language we use because we want everyone to understand.

We are going to stop saying the phrase "join us." We say it all the time. "Join us for worship. Join us for cookies and coffee. Join us as we do this or that." We mean well. The problem with saying "join us," I have learned, from my colleague, Rev. Kelli Driscoll Crews, is that what is implied is, "Come and be just like us and do things the way we do them. Assimilate." What we really mean, though, is "You are invited to help us become the church we were created to be." You are invited to learn with us, grow with us, teach us, serve with us, in whatever way is comfortable for you." Imagine the possibilities! Imagine a community where everyone is truly free to be who they were created to be. Imagine the children of that community growing up being told over and over again that who they are, who they are becoming, is beautiful. How might the world be different?

We are going to prioritize relationships over everything else. So, that means Family Ministries will include all families...with and without children, young, old, small, large. Yes, Callie Rivera, our Coordinator of Family Ministries has a really big job! And her job is not to indoctrinate our children and youth. I was at a PFLAG meeting not long after I came to town. I was excited to meet people and Tim Hudson introduced me to a woman who, at first, didn't seem like she wanted much to do with me. And I understood why when she asked, "So, if I bring my child to your church, will you indoctrinate him into thinking a bunch of fairy tales are true?" I said, "No, but we will give him cookies and tell him we love him...and so does God." That sassy woman and her little boy are members of this church now.

And finally, we are going to move into this new day, recognizing that nothing will ever be the way it was before COVID. We are going to acknowledge that there is grief that comes with that. We are also going to acknowledge that maybe the way

it was before wasn't working for a lot of people. There are so many possibilities! How does each day begin? FULL OF POSSIBILITIES!

I have heard from my colleagues, whose churches have been meeting in-person for a while, that attendance on Sunday morning is not bouncing back. And when they talk about it, they are afraid. What might this mean for their churches, for their jobs? And where did all the people go? True, some people are still not comfortable in large groups indoors, even with masks. I get that. But some people have just straight up found other things to do on Sundays. They watch worship later...or not.

We have to consider that maybe in the future Sunday mornings won't be the "main event" of the week for the church. Maybe Thursday night Pub Theology will be. Maybe Taco Tuesday will be how most of us will gather. Maybe Zoom game nights or book groups will keep us connected. Maybe we will seriously engage homelessness and build some tiny houses on that soccer field and that will be how we worship. Maybe we will host a community youth group for teens in the LGBTQ+ community and those of us who aren't hanging with the teens will be cooking and filling water balloons. So many possibilities and we get to decide!

So, church, what do you want to be? Whatever it is...I want it to be FUN. I want us to love what we do and create together. I want people to "wonder what kind of juice is in those communion cups at DCC because they sure do laugh a lot, they seem to really like being together, and man...they love hard!" It is a new day, Church, Happy Birthday! May the Holy Spirit remind us that every single day is FULL OF POSSIBILITIES! Amen.