

Lectionary A June 4, 2017 Pentecost Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:24-34,35b
I Corinthians 12:3b-13
John 20:19-23

What's Going On Here, Anyway?

What's going on here? Are they drunk? Those were probably very reasonable questions to ask on that first Pentecost day. Just imagine: Wind blowing through that room whose doors were closed. And something like pillars of fire are on the tops of everyone's heads. And the weirdest thing—everyone was speaking in another language, and not a language they knew—but a language the Jews from other countries understood.

So, what **is** going on here, anyway? I talk all the time about how Jesus stepped outside the boundaries of society. Jesus' ministry here on earth was about going places where logic tells us is irrational. Jesus touched the unclean, sat and ate with sinners, stood up for the rejected. Jesus loved the unlovable. People thought he was crazy, or drunk, or just plain blatantly against what they upheld as right. Jesus scared them so much they killed him. But that didn't stop Jesus' love from showing up in the unstoppable flaming power of his Spirit.

There are some things we can be sure of when it comes to the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was with the disciples in a room behind closed doors, *"he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" The Holy Spirit is a gift from God to empower us. And we read in our text from 1 Corinthians that the Holy Spirit brings us each gifts. As the Message Bible puts it, *"God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all."* Friday at the IK Synod Assembly I lead a workshop helping people discern what their unique gifts from God are and how these gifts fit into God's plan for us in God's kingdom. Our gifts are designed for each of us individually to be used for the Body of Christ. And I know that is another sermon, or Bible study and we will be talking about these gifts another time, but today there's something else.

What's going on here, anyway? We learn today that when the Holy Spirit comes things don't go according to our plans. We are whooshed out of our places behind closed doors. We see two stories that tell us this, today. Jesus' words to the disciples behind closed doors is, *"'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'*"

And in the story in Acts of that first Pentecost day, these Gentile followers of Jesus found themselves literally blown out of their safety zone. With the fire of the Holy Spirit they were speaking in languages of people who were not like them. Again, I'm reading from the Message Bible, *"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"*

¹²*Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?"*

What about us today? Well, as we sit here in our sanctuary, safe and secure, worshipping and learning, we don't know what's in store for us. We don't know what will happen when we open those doors and are sent out. We can plan. We can dream. We can hope. But we don't know. What we do know is the Holy Spirit is with us and will not leave us no matter what we face.

That's another sure thing we know about this Spirit gift from God. The Spirit is with us as our "friend," that's what Jesus said. "I'm sending you a friend that will always be with you." The Holy Spirit is not a superhero that flies in to rescue us from the lumps and bumps in life. That was never God's plan. The Holy Spirit is here to walk with us in our lives and empower us to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world. When the world delivers the hard stuff, we are not whisked away in the arms of Superman or Wonder Woman, I had to get a plug in for her. But we are never left alone.

At the synod assembly, one of the speakers was a young woman who works for Lutheran World Hunger. Her story was powerful. She was an adopted child from S. Korea. She told how, when she was twelve years old she met her birth father. She found out she was the youngest of five daughters born to this poor rice farmer in S. Korea. In S. Korea they depend on having sons. You see, they cannot pass their property on to daughters, only sons. This farmer couldn't support all his daughters so when this little girl was born he made the hard decision to give her up for adoption. He knew if she went to the United States she would receive a good education and never be hungry. He gave her up because he wanted more for her than he could provide. Now she is empowered by the Holy Spirit to be an advocate for justice for women's rights, and for the hungry. She boldly says and believes that World Hunger can be irradiated. *What's going on here, anyway?*

I read a story this week about a young man who works at McDonald's who witnessed a blind customer drop a twenty dollar bill. Another customer picked it up and pocketed it. When he approached that person and asked him to return it his request was refused. He first of all told that person to leave that he would not serve him and then he took a twenty out of his own pocket and gave it to the blind customer. *What's going on here, anyway?*

I see story after story of people reaching out to those they don't know, going beyond the boundaries society gives them to love God's children when it isn't logical. There were lots of stories this week about churches that are small, smaller than our little church that step out in faith that the Holy Spirit is with them beyond their closed doors. Their ministries are making a difference to the homeless, the hungry, the lonely, the shunned.

I stand here in a congregation that I love. We have had our ups and downs and it sometimes seemed safer to stay behind our closed doors and huddle together, but we didn't. In the midst of the storms we are feeding the poor with our Mission of Grace ministry. We are planting a garden there to feed more. We are partnering with congregations like the Fresh Air Community to do justice in Evansville. We made our space a safe space for all people to come worship and be fed God's love. We opened our doors to the LBGTT folks. We are continually learning and through the Connect program are learning how to keep transforming, using our unique gifts for ministry here in our community. *"What is going on here, anyway?"*

Here's the deal about the Promise of Pentecost. This Holy Spirit comes into our lives, sometimes, quietly like a whisper, sneaking up on us when we least expect it and sometimes the Spirit knocks us off our feet in a dramatic way. But we can count on this. The Holy Spirit God comes to be with us and for us and to use all that we have and are for the sake of all of God's children. And when they see us coming, some will say, . *"What is going on here, anyway?"* Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.