

Indwelling

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Texts: Acts 2:1-12, John 20:19-23

SCRIPTURE READING Acts 2:1-21 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.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

John 20:19-23 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’

What would Jesus do? Remember those bracelets that were popular a few decades ago? Bracelets, hats, T-shirts, anything with the WWJD imprint? Like, if Jesus would do it, that's what I'm gonna do, too. I confess this troubled me a bit. I mean, ultimately what Jesus did was save people. Save their bodies, save their souls. But me? Honestly? I can't save anyone.



But now, on my second-to-last Sunday, I find myself haunted by that very question. What would Jesus do if he only had a little time left with his people? What *did* he do? What *did* he say? What can I say that's so powerful, so earth-shaking, so life-changing, you'll never ever forget it? I know. Nothing.

I can't give you a sacrament. Jesus already gave you baptism and communion. I will wash your feet if you want me to. (See me afterwards in the Garden of Life with a tub of warm, soapy water.) But I can't die for you. Well, I could, but a fat lot of good it would do.

But I can repeat two things that Jesus did when he saw his time on earth ending. First, he told them he loved them and he told them his Father loved them, and he reminded them to love each other. Second, he told them an advocate was on the way that would help them through the direst future. He told them everything would be all right. He told them to wait and trust.

I can do that. I can tell you how much you are loved. How much God loves you. How much I love you. How much love I see in you loving each other. I can tell you for sure that *love lives here*, in this place. As God is my witness, I *am* a witness to your love.

And I can tell you that you will never be alone. You will never be orphaned. You will always have a helper. I can tell you to trust that everything will be all right.

I can tell you those things over and over again until your eyes roll back in your heads and I fall down from exhaustion. But can I be sure you'll hear them? I can't, I guess. That's when preachers get clever and try to make the point with heart-warming, feel-good stories. Yeah. I love those stories. I shed my tear or two and go home feeling fulfilled and content. And then I don't do a darn thing Jesus would do until the next Sunday. Even if I could.



So I don't have a hard-hitting emotional story to tell today. I just have this story of Pentecost. It's a story of love and trust. Jesus loved and trusted the disciples not to give up but to wait for the Spirit. The disciples loved and trusted Jesus enough to wait. That's an awful lot of trust on both sides. What happened was worth waiting for. They were "clothed with power from on high," as Jesus promised. They were so fired up that people who looked at them saw flames spouting from their heads. Or maybe

pouring into them. Or both? Who knows? The disciples experienced a miracle of speaking. Or other people experienced a miracle of hearing. Or both!

One thing for sure: they started out in a house (as we read) but they didn't stay there. They didn't practice until they got their foreign accents just right. The writer doesn't even say they went outside. They're in the house, and then they're out in the street, and the crowds are gathering. Instantly on the spot, doing their thing.

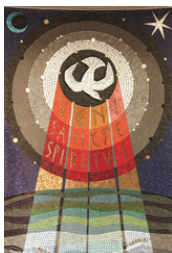


We call this the birth of the church: the wait is over. Love is happening all over the place. It's like watching the birds sitting on the nest, sitting on the nest, and all of a sudden there are these great big beaks gaping over the rim. So much love! I googled the words "love hatching" and got this picture of mama lovebird and her brood. Grotesque little babies, aren't they? But you can see how much she loves them.

Then again, we never know quite what we're getting until it breaks out of the shell, do we? Yet who's to say mama desert tortoise doesn't think her baby is the cutest thing ever? Mama turtles and tortoises, snakes and lizards and such are actually more like Jesus. They lay the eggs and leave. The eggs hatch on their own, babies fending for themselves in a wild world. That takes a lot of trust, too. They're going to be exposed to dangers they haven't learned about yet. That's like the church, too. For the first 300 years, they were more or less constantly under attack. Why did they stick with it? Trust and love. They were martyred by the hundred, thrown in jail, tortured for their beliefs. They never gave up. They got stronger. They went out and shared the good news of God's love and forgiveness everywhere.



The church of Jesus Christ doesn't start to die until safety becomes its priority, and rules of behavior are more important than the rule of love. When its energy goes to building higher and fancier walls, when those who "misbehave" are shut out, because they're feared, and mistrusted. Love and trust don't rely on bulletproof windows and locked doors; love and trust are the prerequisites for the Spirit's dwelling *inside us*. And when the Spirit dwells within us, we are where Jesus is: Not inside the fortress, but outside, talking *and listening to* the uninitiated, unlawful, unwashed, unhoused, uninsured, and unprotected. That's where the Spirit sends us.



The best thing the Spirit did for the disciples was not to make them instant linguists but to kick them out of the sanctuary and into the street. We can't crawl back in the shell after the Spirit breaks it from within. But you are not alone. You are not orphaned. You are not powerless. That's the promise. Out there, in the wild world, you're at the center of God's will, and nothing is safer than that.

What can I promise you today? What did Jesus promise his disciples? Not a building. Not a system of rules. Not membership in an exclusive club of the privileged and the blessed. Not even eternal bliss. He promised them the peace of complete healing, utter forgiveness, power welling up from within. He promised they'd be with him. With good friends. Making good trouble. Sharing good news. Giving and getting more love than they ever dreamt of. The promise still stands. Amen. So be it. TBTG.

Image credits:

Kossowski, Adam. *Veni Sancti Spiritus*, London, England ca. 1965

Koenig, Peter. *Pentecost*, 2013; both from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Prayers

Rejoicing in the presence of the Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle the flames of our witness to God's presence. We pray for the leaders of the church and all the people of God, that together we might live the gospel, and reach out to those with needy hearts.

Come, Holy Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. We pray for oceans and sky, for rivers and deserts, for lakes and forests, for mountains and grasslands.

Come, Holy Spirit, and pour out your justice on all nations. We pray for countries wracked with violence, for soldiers and civilians, for peacemakers and relief agencies.

Come, Holy Spirit, and guide us in our work. We pray for firefighters and scientists, for midwives and custodians, for writers and housekeepers, for parents and students, for all who live out the gifts of the Spirit in their lives. ...

Come, Holy Spirit, and give hopeful visions to the young and life-giving dreams to the old. Bring comfort to those dear to us who are in any sort of distress.

Come, Holy Spirit, and bind us to the communion of saints who have gone before us. We remember with thanksgiving all those who served and witnessed by your power.

And now with the trust that is ours in being sons and daughters of God, we pray to the One we call Abba, Father, the prayer of Jesus. Our Father, who art in heaven...