

“Moving in Our Midst”

Acts 2:1-18

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Today we heard the story of the first Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension. Pentecost, we remember, is a Jewish holy day. It is a harvest festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. It is one of the three Jewish festivals that are considered pilgrimage festivals. Thus, the story takes place in Jerusalem and in the midst of crowds of Jewish people, some who lived there and others who had simply traveled for that occasion.

For those of us who are Christians, *this* is often the story we think of when we think of the Holy Spirit. After all, this is not only a story we hear each year, but it also comes with the most drama.

There was, Luke tells us, “a sound like the rush of a violent wind.”

There were “divided tongues, as of fire” resting on each of Jesus’ followers gathered there.

And there was the phenomenon of people being able to speak in languages other than their own.

Not only that, but if we read on in Acts we hear that about 3,000 people were baptized... so this event had an impact.

This is the story we tend to think about when we think of the Holy Spirit. And yet, most of us have not had these types of experiences.

If we’ve heard a violent wind...we’ve taken cover because it was likely a tornado or a derecho.

If we’ve experienced fire...it’s most likely with safe practices around a campfire. And if it looked like it was resting on us, we would stop, drop, and roll.

If we’ve been heard speaking in other languages...it has likely been after putting our *Babbel* subscription to good use.

While we are often fascinated with this Biblical story, many of us watch it from a distance because we don’t think we can really relate to it. We read it as a story of faith. Or we read it as something that happened one time, long ago. But rarely do we read it with anticipation of how we might also experience the Holy Spirit.

But, perhaps, the big, dramatic moments of this story distract us from something else that is so important. Yes, we are told that the people that day experienced sights and

sounds that were shocking, that they couldn't ignore. But that wasn't all they experienced.

No, the part we often miss is the way the Spirit, in this story, throughout the stories of the early church, and in earlier Biblical stories, becomes the glue that connects people.

The wind and flames grab our attention, but what lasts from this story are the connections.

People living near each other, celebrating a common holy day, but separated by language and culture could understand each other.

People, many of them poor and struggling under the weight of the empire's oppressive ways, found a community where they were seen and where they were valued.

We notice when Luke tells us that 3,000 were baptized. We might even be jealous of the church's growth. But that isn't a comment that is about statistics. It isn't a detail put in so that they would get a church growth award. Rather, it is a comment about the connections that were made as people looked at each other, saw each other, valued each other...as people, like the quote from the prophet Joel points out, people of all ages and genders and backgrounds became those whose voices represented God. It was in the midst of these realities that the church grew. Because when the Spirit showed up, then people were valued and relationships mattered.

In J.V. Taylor's book, *The Go-Between God*, "He describes a West Indian woman in London, who in her flat had just received the news that her husband had been killed in a street accident. She sat in the corner of the sofa, paralysed. Nobody could get near to her; it was as if she were in a trance. And then the teacher of one of her children came in, saw the situation in a moment and sat down beside her, and put her arm across her shoulders and held her tightly. The white face was pressed to the brown one. And as the intolerable pain of this seeped through to the visitor, her tears began to fall, onto their hands clasped in the woman's lap. This went on until the grieving woman herself began to weep, and their tears were mingled, and the healing began.

"[Taylor goes on saying,] 'That is the embrace of God. That is [God's] kiss of life. That is the embrace of [God's] mission with our intercession. And the Holy Spirit is the force in the straining muscles of an arm; the Holy Spirit is in the thin film of perspiration between a white cheek and a brown one. The Holy Spirit is in those mingled tears falling onto those clasped hands. [The Holy Spirit] is as close and as unobtrusive as that, and as irresistibly strong'

Catholic Brother Mark O'Connor, in reflecting on Taylor's writing, goes on saying, "The Holy Spirit, then, is the invisible third party who stands between me and the other, making us mutually aware. The Spirit opens our eyes to Christ and also opens our eyes to our brothers and sisters in Christ—especially the poor (Br Mark O'Connor FMS, "The

go-between God” in 2 August 2022 edition of “The Catholic Outlook”, The go-between God - Catholic Outlook).

See, we might not know exactly what to do with a wind and flames kind of Spirit. But we do know what to do with a connection kind of Spirit.

Maybe the Holy Spirit isn't such a foreign being after all. Maybe rather than wondering if or when we will experience the Spirit, maybe if we stop and pay attention we will realize that it has been with us all along.

Because what if, each point of connection, is evidence of the Holy Spirit?

What if, standing in the serving line at Free Lunch, when we look in the eyes of our neighbor and see their humanity and they, ours...what if the Spirit is the lens that allows our clear vision?

What if, as elder and teenager become friends...what if the Spirit is that place of connection?

What if, as voices once silenced...voices of children, voices of women, voices of differently-abled, voices of non-dominant cultures...what if as those voices are heard, it is the Spirit who amplifies them?

Sometimes the Spirit shows up in dramatic and attention-getting ways. And sometimes we need that. Sometimes we need to be shaken out of our apathy and woken up.

But, likely more often than we realize, the Spirit is already moving in our midst...around us, within us, and as the connection between us: building community, creating relationships, teaching us to honor one another. Pay attention...the Spirit is moving among us. Amen.