

Sermon:

Friends, it is good to be with you on this Pentecost Sunday, and I would like to acknowledge the unique situation we find ourselves in this day – that as we celebrate the Holy Spirit granting the disciples the ability to speak in multiple languages, we worship together in one language this morning. Thank you for listening to my Midwest American accent this morning. I know you might be surprised to find this out, but I was naughty when I was a kid. I got in trouble quite often, but in hindsight, it wasn't that I was naughty per se, but that I was curious! I was curious to see what my name might look like after I wrote it in the wet cement when a new sidewalk was poured in our neighborhood. I was curious to see if my brother would notice that I took his Halloween candy and ate it. I was curious to see if my dad would notice I would take change out of his money jar to buy candy bars after swimming lessons. I had a curiosity about me as a child that tended to get me into trouble. When I was 9 or 10 years old, I can't remember specifically now, I heard the telephone ring in our house and my mom answered the phone. I heard her talking quietly and understood that something was wrong. I had been causing some trouble with a neighborhood friend and suspected we were getting caught but my mom didn't say anything to me. But as soon as my dad got home from work he called me to their bedroom, sat me down on their bed and said to me, "Do you have anything to tell me?" Well, of course, absolutely everything that I had done against the rules poured out of my heart and onto his lap. I think he learned so much more than he was expecting when he called me to account. He thought he was sitting me down to talk about one thing and a hundred other things came tumbling out. Oh how I wish I could talk with my dad now and see what he would have to say about that encounter from my childhood.

I was remembering this childhood encounter as I read and studied our passage from John as Jesus prepares his disciples for his imminent death and resurrection and the promise of the Spirit that would be given to his followers. Throughout the Bible we have glimpses of what we now refer to as the Holy Spirit, and throughout the stories of Jesus the Holy Spirit is seen in the form of a dove or referred to as the Comforter. But here in John, the word for Spirit is understood as the Counselor. The Counselor, in Greek it is the word *paraclete*, is understood in more judicial terms. There is some difficulty in translating this word fully into English but a *paraclete*, the counselor, is the one who convicts you of wrongdoing or, a second understanding, is someone who convinces you of the argument from the other standpoint. Think about how we refer to our lawyers as counsel. This is the idea that is being summed up in the word *paraclete*. In John 16:9, the Paraclete will expose the truth of sin, which in the book of John is a theological and not moral category. The Paraclete will bring to light God's righteousness in that Jesus' death is not the end but victory over death (16:33), fully realized in Jesus' ascension. And the Paraclete will uncover the evil one as having no power over Jesus (14:30) because of God's love for the world. Some commentators also refer to the Spirit here as the Exposer. The Paraclete will lay bare the self-judgment that occurs when one chooses the darkness over the light (3:17–21). In this role, the Paraclete affirms and confirms the disciples' decision to follow Jesus in contrast to those unwilling to believe God's revelation in Jesus. (Working Preacher, 19 May 2024) In the encounter with my dad, the Spirit didn't have to work too hard to convince me of my wrongdoing and as I laid bare my soul to my dad I felt much better afterwards!

Jesus was encouraging his disciples this promised Holy Spirit would come and would be capable of convicting people's hearts, of changing people's minds. But we can see in our world, and in personal encounters, that so many people in the world operate out of hard heartedness or stubbornness, unwilling to allow that spirit of conviction or of the changing of perspectives guide them. Have you ever tried to change someone's mind? It is incredibly difficult, especially when we dig our heels in. As I have grown older I can more readily recognize the story of Pharaoh when Moses is attempting to free the Israelites. We read that Pharaoh had a hard heart, refused to have his mind changed. I see glimpses of that in what is happening between Russia and Ukraine and in the Middle East. Leaders are leading with hard heartedness and stubbornness and common people suffer because of it. And as pastor and friend I have encountered situations where people have come to me in difficult personal situations and seek counsel, yet refuse to take responsibility for the ways they have contributed to those problematic situations. It is understandable in some ways that we form layers of protection around ourselves having been battered and beaten by the world, by life, by the ebb and flow of pain that surrounds us. C.S. Lewis was like that, although he surrounded his world in layers of philosophical and educational superiority. Many of you will be familiar with the famous author of the Narnia tales – that he was a staunch atheist for many years of his early adulthood but he couldn't shake this nagging feeling that he was missing something significant in life. He set out to find the source of joy in the world and he kept coming back to a feeling that the God of Christianity just possibly could be real and present in his life. He recounts the moment when the possibility of God became reality for him. As Lewis recounts his moment of conversion he writes, "Without words and I think almost without images, a fact about myself was somehow presented to me. I became aware that I was holding something at bay, or shutting something out. Or, if you like, that I was wearing some stiff clothing, like corsets, or even a suit of armor, as if I were a lobster. I felt myself being, there and then, given a free choice. I could open the door or keep it shut; I could unbuckle the armor or keep it on... I chose to open, to unbuckle,

to loosen the rein... I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt.” Lewis had formed layers of armor around himself over the years but in this moment he unbuckled that armor and let the warmth of God melt that man of ice that was living within. When we open our ears and our hearts to hear the Spirit beckoning us towards God we find grace and one who turns our hearts of stone to ones of flesh.

Jesus promised his disciples, and us, that we would receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon us and it is this heavenly power that transforms our lives and enables us to subvert earthly power for a heavenly one. And this is the power that transformed the lives of the disciples into world changers. This power of God is one that heals and liberates, a power that intervenes and forgives. However, we are far too quick to settle for earthly personal power or control. Julian of Norwich said, “For this is the reason why we are not fully at ease in heart and soul: because here we seek rest in these things that are so little, in which there is no rest, and we recognize not our God who is all powerful, all wise, all good, for God is the true rest.”

So then what? What are *we* to do with this blessing of the Holy Spirit? “Tessa Bielecki, a former Carmelite nun and abbess, speaks of a quality in the great saints and mystics that she calls ‘bounce,’ a capacity for resilience ‘in the face of human frailty that enables us to face the suffering and death around us and not be overcome’ – and by this she is not talking about something quiet and subtle and dignified, but ‘an uproarious kind of hilarity that wells up out of the depths of our stillness.’ Bielecki says: ‘The world needs jesters more than ever... and laughter becomes a sign of deep faith, hope and love – ~~it can become an apostolate~~ – a form of outreach – our highest manifestation of compassion.” (stja.ca website May 2024) “The witness of Pentecost is that the presence of the Spirit made the disciples ecstatic – they were so full of exuberance that people assumed they were drunk, yet apparently they were very much aligned with the Spirit of Jesus their Mentor.” (stja.ca website May 2024) This is one of the reasons I wear my red shoes today – to remind myself of the “bounce” that comes with a closeness to Jesus. And this is why I encouraged you to wear red today – to remind you this light heartedness comes with knowing Jesus has promised to be with us always to the very end of the age and he has promised to carry our burdens for us. This bounce, this lightness of life, is a sign of deep faith and hope and love that comes from the person of Jesus Christ.

Being church in our culture today does not mean we isolate ourselves in a holy conclave away from the culture around us (Newbigin). Lesslie Newbigin, the missional leader of southern India writes, “[The marks of the church] are the spontaneous overflow of a community of praise. They are the radiance of a supernatural reality. That reality is, first of all, the reality of God, the superabundant richness of the being of the Triune God, in whom love is forever given and forever enjoyed in an ever-new exchange. It is secondly the overflow of that love through the presence of the Spirit of God in the life of the community that lives by faith in Christ. It is said of this superabundant glory that it has been given to believers in order that they may be recognizable as a community where the love of God is actually tested and known. This is what makes the church a place of joy, of praise, of surprises, and of laughter – a place where there is a foretaste of the endless surprises of heaven.” As the disciples experienced, and the thousands of observers witnessed on that first Pentecost day, when the Holy Spirit was and is given to those who love and follow Jesus Christ something indescribable happens. There is a radiance of life, a warmth and a glow that astounds people, that is a gift of this promised Holy Spirit. Friends, we do not need to convince the world of anything, we simply must live a life connected to Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, that will grant us a bouyant life that the world is so desperate to know and experience. Living a life full of bounce will allow the Holy Spirit the space to do the convincing and changing of hearts that is so needed in this world.

The words of poet and artist Jan Richardson speaks to a Pentecost vision that will guide us into this coming week.

It’s titled:

THIS GRACE THAT SCORCHES US

A Blessing for Pentecost Day

Here’s one thing

you must understand

about this blessing:

it is not

for you alone.

It is stubborn

about this.

Do not even try

to lay hold of it

if you are by yourself,

thinking you can carry it

on your own.

To bear this blessing,

you must first take yourself

to a place where everyone

does not look like you

or think like you,

a place where they do not

believe precisely as you believe,

where their thoughts

and ideas and gestures
are not exact echoes
of your own.
Bring your sorrow.
Bring your grief.
Bring your fear.
Bring your weariness,
your pain,
your disgust at how broken
the world is,
how fractured,
how fragmented
by its fighting,
its wars,
its hungers,
its penchant for power,
its ceaseless repetition
of the history it refuses
to rise above.
I will not tell you
this blessing will fix all that.
But in the place
where you have gathered,
wait.
Watch.
Listen.
Lay aside your inability
to be surprised,
your resistance to what you
do not understand.
See then whether this blessing
turns to flame on your tongue,
sets you to speaking
what you cannot fathom
or opens your ear
to a language
beyond your imagining
that comes as a knowing
in your bones,
a clarity
in your heart
that tells you
this is the reason
we were made:
for this ache
that finally opens us,
for this struggle,
this grace
that scorches us
toward one another
and into
the blazing day.

Prayer:

Holy One,
We are not sure what it would be like
if the Holy Spirit blew through our churches again
as it did on the day of Pentecost.
However, we want to speak the language that you have given,
louder, and more clearly in our lives and church.

So we pray,
come Holy Spirit come,
pour out your fire of love upon us
to be the body of Christ
in a world that is often hurting, hungry, and cynical.

We want to bring the good news to the poor,
heal the broken-hearted,
preach deliverance to captives,
bring recovery of sight to the blind
and set at liberty all that are bruised.

As your disciples,
we pray for all who suffer, are poor,
despairing, burdened, blind and battered.

In your loving breeze,
we pray for health and wholeness for those who are physically ill,
for those who are mentally ailing,
for those who are money sick,
for those who are spiritually unwell.

We pray for the healing of your creation,
and the renewal of the face of the land.
We pray for those who are thirsty,
that they would drink from your fountain of living waters
and never thirst again.

Amen.