

Pentecost, May 31, 2020

The disciples in the upper room at Pentecost had to have one question on their mind. Where was God? Really, when any of us ask this question we are not asking about his address, but we are critiquing his inaction, especially in times of crisis or disappointment. The disciples certainly had experienced both.

Jesus, who walked and talked with them, and engaged in acts of healing and wholeness, had been crucified. Jesus had even raised people from the dead. But death claimed him. Three days later he rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples for 40 days. He ate with them, he blessed them, he pronounced peace upon them. Then in the ascension he gave them a pep talk; “You shall receive power” and a very challenging assignment, “To be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the ends of the earth”. He then left. The disciples stood there, stunned and confused. Two angels inquired “Why are you standing there? Jesus shall return in the same way he left.” I would consider that cold comfort.

So, now they gathered together. Jesus had left the house. They were sheltering together in one place. Wondering, waiting, and asking “Where is God?”. For those of us sheltering in place it is not hard to imagine one day following another, without anything changing, with very little good news, if any news at all with any meaning coming to pass. The sun comes up and it goes down, and then it repeats. The first miracle is that the disciples continued to get along. There were 120 by scripture count, which only includes men. When women and children are included that number would be more like 500. No TV, no internet, no diversions, just an endless parade of days.

Right in the middle of the morning of Pentecost came an incredible contrast to the quiet waiting. There are several miracles. A mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire dancing on the heads of each and every person, and the gift of speaking in other languages to proclaim the mighty acts of God is given to all the disciples.

It is important to notice that it was not a confusion of tongues. Each observer says that they clearly hear God’s works proclaimed in their own dialect. Many here at the church speak several languages and you know it is one thing to understand and speak another language. It is almost impossible to speak in the exact dialect of a language to which you were not born into. So the crowd was shocked, saying, “Aren’t these people from Galilee? For those from Galilee had a distinct accent. Remember when Peter denied Jesus they recognized him as a Galilean because of his dialect.

In any major unprecedented event there are spin doctors. So the crowd provides the spin, mocking them stating “They are drunk with cheap wine”. Peter then says, this is not what you think for it is only 9 o’clock in the morning. I always thought that was not much of a rebuttal. But the charge of being drunk from this crowd that consisted of true party people was a bit like projection. Remember this crowd consisted of people who came for passover and stayed for Pentecost 50 days later, so this may be a case of the pot

calling the kettle black. Peter responds to their mocking with a serious answer, using scripture from Joel 2, which is an encouraging prophecy given by God after Israel experienced a devastating plague of locusts. God says, "In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh". In the Hebrew for that text "Spirit" could be translated as wind, or breath. But it can also be translated spirit, like the spirit and character of a person. God is saying "I will pour out my Holy Spirit, which is my spirit and character." You will be inspired, in the same way that we are inspired when we associate with people who have real "spirit". All of us have had that experience.

He then says that Spirit will release dreams and visions in what had been a time of nightmares. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men and women will see visions and your old shall dream dreams. Wow, that is to gain heart again. For the people in Joel's time, enduring hopes, crushed by locusts, and the people in Peter's time when the death and ascension of Jesus had crushed their hopes, and for us who have been crushed by the conditions of pandemic, the generous outpouring of the Spirit is what we all need. We need to be empowered to prophesy. To understand the signs of the times and to be able to act. The young need be able to visualize things, to not just see what is, but what could be. The old desperately need to again dream dreams, to be like Caleb, the oldest person to enter the promised land with Joshua, who said, "Give me the mountains!"

During this pandemic it is easy to lose heart and to wonder where God is and what he is up to. But this text says he is right here.

I have struggled because I love to be at Trinity. I love the stained glass windows, the pews, the liturgical settings. When Lorraine and I come to worship it always seemed that the sanctuary vibrated with the powerful presence of God. Now the sanctuary and the rooms stand empty. But the message of this passage is that the fire of the spirit is upon every single person at Trinity and in the body of Christ.

When I am at a Zoom meeting, or a Zoom coffee hour, I feel a little bit like I am looking through the 'Magic Mirror' in Romper Room when Nancy Claster, the host, used to say I see "Gary, and Larry and Lorraine". Looking back I have felt foolish thinking that when she said my name she was thinking of me, and I was inspired.

But now I have learned something from this text in Acts. God's Spirit is in all of us here at Trinity. And when we see each other, even though it is only the magic mirror of Zoom, we can be inspired by God's spirit and our love for each other.

Prayer: Holy Lord free us to prophesy your word to all, to dream dreams of a better future and see visions of your justice in all the earth. Amen.