

All Together in One Place

Ps 104: 24-34, 35b

Acts 2: 1-21

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Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works—who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

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.’

The day came, and we were all in one place, *all-in-one-place*. We were gathered together as one, sharing the same space, saying the same words in unison, even breathing the same air. And it was important, it was sacred, and it was holy, because that is what Church is- the people of God gathered in worship and fellowship to minister to one another and beyond the walls of the sanctuary.

Then there was a sound, a bit of news on the wind, but the news grew and came in bigger and bigger gusts. We were bewildered and perplexed. The gentle breeze of bad news became the hurricane-strength force winds of a pandemic.

Then there was a sound- the sound of things changing - suddenly nothing was the same. Where once were words, music, prayers and song were now only the sound of silence, the sound of emptiness. The sanctuary sat quiet, unused, but not forgotten by any means.

Those who used to gather received new languages. new dialects. new understanding. Words like online worship, streaming, Zoom coffee hour, storyboarding, teleprompter, and Movavi video editor were spoken wherever the gathered had become the scattered.

Those who had once gathered together received new power. Those who were once gathered received the Holy Spirit in a new way.

Suddenly it became clear that *what was important had changed*, and we were astonished and amazed. Being in one space *was not* a priority. Speaking in unison *was not* a priority. Being all together to breathe the same air *was not* a priority. The power of the Holy Spirit rearranged our priorities to align them with God's priorities.

The Holy Spirit broke open what had been known, secure, trusted and called forth new life, new ways of being. It's happening to us, now, right now, in this moment and in this breath. It is wind and fire, breath and energy, it is dynamic and life-changing.

Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit as our Advocate—is the birth of the church—and Christian churches often celebrate the birthday of the church with red, with fire, wind, balloons and birthday cake. It is a joyous and spirited gathering. It is indeed a day of celebration.

Yet this Pentecost, in the midst of the world being turned inside-out and upside down, the Holy Spirit pulls us back to *the birth* itself. Today we are not together to happily celebrate the birthday as we are instead with Peter and the eleven other disciples and the small circle of followers who had been safely hidden away in a locked room waiting as Jesus had instructed them just moments prior to his ascension, “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Now, just 9 days later the Holy Spirit, the power from on high has come bold, strong, and provocative in a dynamic chaos. The Holy Spirit comes not as a spark and a flutter, but as a blaze and a whirlwind.

The birth of the church begins inside, in one room, and suddenly bursts forth taking its first breath in the public square in ways that were able to be understood by everyone present. Rome may have thought they were done with Jesus and his followers, but not so.

The Holy Spirit Comforter is also Holy Spirit Disrupter, Holy Spirit Agitator, pushing our faith ancestors to boldly tell of God's love and ‘deeds of power,’ and to then live out those words in their actions that did not mesh with the status quo. They were going out to welcome the outcast, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, and to preach the radical good news.

In our birthday party celebrations of Pentecost, we have tended to limit and tame the Holy Spirit as a gentle Comforter. And it is true that the Holy Spirit is a Comforter who revives, encourages and guides us through times of trouble, who eases our despair and distress, and who reminds us again and again of Jesus' presence and promises. The Divine Comforter has certainly

been with us as we have sought encouragement, guidance and hope during this pandemic, and now something new is breaking forth, it is being kindled and blown around us.

The Holy Spirit Comforter is also Holy Spirit Disrupter, Holy Spirit Agitator, pushing us into new ways of being, giving us the gifts and the courage to be the scattered community, to speak prophetically, to dream dreams and see visions.

In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word ‘Paraclete’ was used to describe this work of the Holy Spirit, the One who would be sent by Jesus as God had promised, so that the believers would be ‘clothed with power from on high.’ ‘Paraclete’ is a compound Greek word that literally means, “to come alongside another.” The Paraclete can be an advocate – to come along side to defend and counsel – or comforter – to come along side to provide comfort and encouragement.

But the one who comes along side just might also do so to strengthen us for work, or to muster our courage, or to prompt or even provoke us to actions that go beyond our comfort zone, to inevitably be pushed beyond what we imagine and end up stirring things up. Pastor and professor David Lose comments, “We tend to think of the Holy Spirit as the *answer* to a problem, but what if the Spirit’s work is *to create for us a new problem*: that we have a story to tell, mercy to share, love to spread, and we just can’t rest until we’ve done so!”

The pandemic is changing our culture and society in profound and meaningful ways. What changes will endure? What passions and compassions will ignite those changes to endure? What creative energy is being birthed through groans, pain, sweat and tears?

We already know that when we can again gather together in worship and fellowship, when we can again share the same space, say the same words in unison, even breathe the same air, it will *look* different,it will *be* different.

In new ways we will bring back so much that we deeply miss, but we will not, cannot, just pick up where we left off. We now live in a new era and the Holy Spirit has been both *Comforter* and *Agitator* as we have been humbled by how little control we have, how dependent we truly are on God and one another, and who our true heroes are.

We are going to come out of this with a much deeper sense of appreciation for so many things we have been taking for granted. We have found ourselves catapulted into learning new technology and in doing so have connected with people in the community who have not worshipped with us before, or who have but are no longer able to do so.

A small group of mask makers have brought the community to the clothesline on our doorstep as we care for one another.

Our ministries and mission have continued in ways which rely on creativity and cooperation in ways that are unique.

What other abilities and priorities will the Holy Spirit offer us, and the Church Universal, as we wonder what all of this means? Where will be led by the bold wind and radiant fire of the Holy Spirit who has come alongside us?

Just as Peter, the eleven other disciples and the small group of followers waited prayerfully and patiently in their safe, locked room, let us with a holy imagining see where we are led beyond our comfort and into something new.

Amen.

