

Three weeks ago, when I was invited to preach this sermon, I had some thoughts on what I might say. I spent a lot of time, a *lot* of time, thinking about my opening line. (Though I'll admit that it never got good enough to share, not even in an anecdote). You see today is not just any Sunday, it's Pentecost Sunday. It's a day where we wear bright red and celebrate the birth of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts. As I thought about what I might say, I imagined that I'd muse on the absurdity of celebrating a birthday during a worldwide pandemic. I even considered, very, *very* briefly about bringing a balloon to get my point across. (I'll remind you that 1) I actually hate balloons so that would have been a terrible idea and 2) I do not, in fact have a balloon with me – so you can rest assured: that thought didn't make it too far down the idea conveyor, to the great benefit of us all).

Of course, those "three weeks" slowly began to trickle into two weeks, and then one, and before I knew it, they had become days, hours, minutes. This very moment. And as I watched that time dwindle before

me, I slowly began to realize that it would do me and you no good at all to preach a sermon from three weeks ago. So, I won't...

Rather, my dear brothers and sisters, I greet you on this day. Today:

Sunday, **May** 31st, 2020 to be with you, whether you are near or far,

as we bear witness to the inbreaking of the Holy Spirit on this, the holy day of Pentecost. So let's begin, shall we?

Our story begins in the Book of Acts, where we find the disciples together in a room, reeling after a wild series of events. It all began when the disciples watched Jesus enter Jerusalem to the sound of acclaim and "Hosannas" only to watch him suffer and die on a cross less than a week later. Three days after that, he's raised from the dead – Alleluia! And then, just now after being with them for a time, Jesus has once again ascended into heaven... As you can imagine, these events have left our disciples feeling shell-shocked, disoriented and a little

uncomfortable. As they sit there together in that room, you can almost feel the tension. There's a thickness to it. It's still... almost eerily quiet...

Until it's not.

Suddenly, and without warning, the Holy Spirit rushes in, cutting right through all that tension and quiet, and she fills the room; it's like a watching a long strip of gasoline being ignited with a single match.

Holy chaos.

Luke writes that in that moment, "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."

Tongues *as of fire*. This Spirit, in all her might and power, gives these weary, broken down disciples the power to speak – and not only that, but to be *understood* by the crowd that had gathered at the sight.

Make no mistake, just as she dwelled with those disciples, so too did

she dwell among the gathered crowds: this gift of *understanding* being an equal sign of her great might and power.

Even so, at this sight, there were those who could not quite grapple with what the Spirit was there to do and say. Luke writes that while many were amazed and perplexed, others sneered and concluded that it could only be explained by drunkenness and debauchery at work...

Let's pause here for a moment.

My friends, do you see it? Do you feel that same holy chaos; that *inbreaking* of the Spirit; here with us today?

We too have experienced our fair share of events that have left us feeling broken down, haven't we? Perhaps when you logged on this morning (or this afternoon) to watch this broadcast, you found yourself like those disciples that day – exhausted, weary, and let's name it: maybe even a little *angry*.

In just a few months, it seems our entire world has been upended by a vicious pandemic which has left death and devastation in its wake.

From overwhelmed hospitals and ever-increasing death tolls to unprecedented job loss, I think it's safe to say we're experiencing some chaos (none of it Holy, I might add).

And for our brothers and sisters of color, this same weariness and exhaustion is only amplified by the slew of extrajudicial murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and most recently, George Floyd. So too we recall the events that took place in El Paso, TX, less than a year ago, in which a white supremacist, fueled by hate and intolerance, took the life of 15 year old, Javier Amir Rodriguez, along with 21 others who were simply trying to shop in peace. These events, while not at all uncommon, have shaken the nationwide conscious of what it means to be black or brown in America.

My friends, the Spirit sees you in your weariness; and she has seen those hands of injustice, clenched tightly around the throats of the oppressed, and she is speaking up, rushing in with a wind and fire

unlike that which we have ever seen. Slowly, she is unclenching those fists; giving voice back to the voiceless; song back to the songless.

The Spirit is speaking up. Do you hear her?

Peter, evoking the words of the prophet, Joel, tells it like this:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
...your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
...your young men shall see visions,
... 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.’

My friends, do you see it?

That same Spirit who was with God in the beginning, moving mountains and oceans and dry desert, breathing life into the Earth. The same Spirit who cut through the silence and exhaustion of those disciples as they sat, wearied, in that room following Jesus' death and ascension. The same spirit who dwelled among John Lewis, Amelia Boynton, Rev. Dr. King and the thousands of others in 1965 as they marched from Selma to Montgomery in pursuit of justice and equality for all...

That same Spirit is with us here. Today.

Do you see it?

Can you feel that wind? Do you smell that smoke? Can you taste that fire?

Do you hear her people?

She is with you as you struggle to make sense of all that has happened in the last few weeks, months, or even years. She is with your friend who has lost her job and is unsure how she'll pay rent next month. She

dwells among your neighbor who has been told through countless acts of unchecked, unjust violence that his life somehow doesn't matter.

Where she hasn't started her own, holy fires, the Spirit is sitting with those who are consumed by the flames of grief and oppression.

And, as Mary Oliver so beautifully puts it, "what's coming next is coming with its own heaven and grace"...

Hear these words of the apostle Peter:

"listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power."

Did you catch that last sentence? *Impossible*. Because it was *impossible* for Jesus to be held by the power of death.

My friends, I am here today to tell you that *death does not get the last word*. You see it was the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and breathed a word of power upon those crowds that day. And it is that same Spirit who breathes life back into those who we have loved and lost, whether to illness or injustice. She breathes life back into Cindi, Clodagh, Jack, Karl, Alice,

She breathes life back into Javier Amir Rodriguez, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd. She brings life and breathe back the breathless.

Can you feel it?

Earlier, I shared with you that I had little interest in preaching a word that belonged to three weeks ago. And though I've spent a bit of time here today with our disciples of 2000 years ago, or the events of this past year, I believe that holds true.

You see, we cannot live in three weeks ago. Or three months ago. Or even three days ago. There is no going back to what was before. That

was true for the disciples, and so it is true for us. And perhaps that's okay.

You see the Spirit is moving among us with an urgency and a fervor that requires our full and focused attention. We cannot let ourselves become lost in yesterday, for what she is doing today – at this very moment – is far too important.

The Spirit is moving like a fire through the streets and alleyways, in all the broken places. She is here in this church – and no, I don't mean this building – I mean this church that has gathered here today to bear witness to her bright and burning flame, her mighty, wonderous wind.

Do not let her blow on by. No, let yourself get caught up in that wind.

Get caught up in that fire. For you see the work of the Spirit is far from over. In fact, it's only getting started.

Do you see it?