

Pentecost Sermon – The Spirit Poured Out: Inspiration for Change

There is old, well-known saying uttered by the morose teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes:

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Anyone paying attention to the news today might find themselves appreciating the sentiment of the teacher and even agreeing with them, that year to year, nothing seems to change. So much of our toil, so much of the insatiable global desire to produce and consume, so much of the greed, violence, and suffering we witness, seems to repeat in endless cycles and it all feels like nothing but a “chasing after the wind.” All human aspirations, all our good intentions and hard-won efforts to change this world seem futile. We are stuck, trapped by the Spirit of the age. Bet you didn’t think I’d start this sermon on such a low note! Thankfully, while the bible includes books like Ecclesiastes that allow us to be honest about the futility of so much human aspiration, it also has books that give us a bold vision of human *inspiration*, a vision of humanity filled with a different Spirit than the Spirit of this age. Thankfully the bible has books that testify to God’s disruptive *promise*, a promise to draw creation out of the cycles of futility and into the fulness of the divine life of love.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is one of these books in our bible. From start to finish the Acts of the Apostles testifies to a disruption of the futility of so much of our world – a disruption brought by the Spirit of God that descends in fire and wind to refine and make things new. Early in the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter stands up in front of a crowd and makes clear that those that had Jesus crucified had played the same old part of human aspiration in the service of futility. Indeed, for so many of Jesus’ early followers, his death must have felt like the ultimate Ecclesiastes moment: nothing has changed. All the promise of this man, Jesus, and there

he is, dead on a cross, cold in the tomb. What happened to the others before him has happened again. Empires will kill, greed will proliferate, hate will win out over love. And then, the unthinkable words were uttered: he is risen and he's gone ahead of you. Something has changed. A new gift is coming. There *is* something new under the sun. Say that with me: "There is something new under the Sun." [Congregational Response] No longer will you chase after the wind. Now you can be living vessels of the wind of God's life-giving, transforming Spirit at work in the world.

Today – this very day of Pentecost on May 28th, 2023, and in this place, Bloomingdale Mennonite Church, we aim to so open ourselves to the newness of God – to God's spirit poured out, unexpectedly. While the gap of time and culture and place is so huge, we must nonetheless exercise our imaginations and place ourselves in the vicinity of that first century room where Jesus' apostles were gathered. What were they doing that day, I wonder? The first chapter of *Acts* gives us some sense. They had been sorting out leadership questions – filling the slate of roles, as it were – who will replace Judas, how will we be fit to lead this band of Christ-followers into the future? But in the midst of their planning suddenly, *disruption!* Fire and wind and bewilderment. The Apostles' *aspirations* were instantly burned away in the Spirit's descent – God's *inspiration* come among them. Nothing could have prepared them for what was to come. Apart from any intention to do so, they found themselves preaching to Jews from all surrounding nations, telling them that the story of Jesus had disrupted the cycles of their world's futility – Jesus' story was God's story, the story that would not be relegated to the past, but would instead determine the future. Say this with me: "Jesus' story determines our future." [*Congregations Response*]

Their message seemed foolish to many – in fact, many thought they were drunk. They were not well-respected speakers. They were not the fancy, well-prepared TED Talk speakers

wowing their audiences. They looked socially suspect – outside the norm. But that didn't matter, because it was the *inspiration* of the Spirit that brought the persuasive power that day, not the *aspiration* and charisma of the speakers.

And then, just as these unprepared Apostles experienced inspiration through the Spirit for this preaching, the crowds too were inspired as the Spirit came upon them and *pierced their hearts*. Now there's a striking image: pierced hearts. Piercing involves pain – and indeed this piercing would involve pain for those listening to this rag-tag group of disciples. Those gathered were brought face to face with their guilt – face to face with their participation in a world that killed prophets like Jesus – that pushed them onto crosses. But as Peter addressed them, he named their guilt for the sake of their *freedom to change*, not for the sake of keeping them enslaved to the past. And in response they said: “what should we do?” Say that with me: “What should we do?” [*Congregational Response*] Peter's response was: “Be the community of those who let Jesus' story determine their future. Be a community of people who let the Spirit inspire their dreams and visions for the future. Be a community that tries new ways of organizing life together – share things in common with others and care for the vulnerable around you - share the gift of a *future* of hope for you and your children, for God's gift is the gift of a future. Say that with me: “God's gift is the gift of a future.” [*Congregational response*]

The message of Pentecost is that futility is not the last word, we're not doomed to just chase the wind. Redemptive, reconciling, healing change can happen – however slowly it may seem to come. The question is, when it comes, will we welcome it? When God inspires us, will we let that Spirit work in us? Will we let the Spirit pierce our hearts too? Here's a challenge for us all this week: take time out of each day this week to stop and pray: “Spirit of God, what should we do?” Then throughout the day, listen for a response – listen with your ears to answers

that may come from people around you; watch with your eyes for signs; pay attention to your daytime and nighttime visions of a future of hope, no matter how unrealistic those visions may seem. And then, come next week, when we have our AGM and discuss both our past and our future as God's church gathered in Bloomingdale, we might be prepared to share the inspiration God gives through the Spirit. May it be so, for we proclaim a God whose Spirit does not leave the order of things as they are, but who pours out the Spirit, turning the world around. Let us now proclaim this God through song as we sing "My Soul Cries Out."