

THE REAL MIRACLE OF PENTECOST

Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-4; John 7:37-39 May 31, 2020

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In *Tales of a Magic Monastery*, a new monk asks his teacher, "Father, tell me something about yourself"

The elder priest pauses, never having given the matter much thought

--finally, he answers, "My name . . . used to be ME . . . but now ... it's YOU"

That's the real miracle of Pentecost: this shift from Me-Ness to You-Ness

It's easy to miss amid all the theatrics: the flaming tongues, a mighty rushing wind,
and giddy disciples, punch-drunk with joy, spilling into the streets

--but the heart of the Spirit's work is leading us from Me-Ness to You-ness:

Getting ourselves off our hands long enough to be of real use to somebody else

For an unflattering picture of Me-Ness, consider the story of Moses from today's Old Testament lesson

Moses is whipped and defeated after listening to the Hebrews endless complaints about life in the wilderness

--"We remember the fish we ate in Egypt," they cry, "the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now there nothing's to eat but this bland, sticky, tasteless manna!" (Num. 11:5-6)

In exasperation, Moses turns to God

"Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them that you should say to me 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child?!"

Clearly, Moses has a bad case of burnout

--he's given his best and his best is not good enough

Some of us have been there

Like Moses, we're high achievers

--Knollwood has a lot those -- *high achievers* -- starting with Yours Truly!

But the problem with high achievers is they think they have to do everything themselves

--so they tend to work themselves to exhaustion before throwing up their hands and crying with Moses

"I'm not able to carry this people alone; they are too heavy for me"
(Numbers 11:14)

So the Lord breathes the divine Spirit into 70 Elders so Moses will know he is not meant to do this alone

Then all those elders start prophesying, filled to overflowing with the life and love of God

--and that includes two elders left back in camp -- Elda and Mead

Joshua, Moses' lieutenant, is alarmed about the Spirit breaking out in unauthorized channels

--but Moses answers, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Divine Spirit would flow in all of them!" (Numbers 11:29)

That's when for Moses, the real miracle of Pentecost happens:

--the renewing, life-giving, Spirit-breathed shift from Me-Ness to You-Ness

A little girl, wanting to help in the garden, set about trying to dislodge a rock

But though she tugged with all her might, she couldn't move it

--finally, she plopped down in frustration: "I can't do it!" she announced

"But you haven't used all your strength," her mother chided

So the child tried again -- tugging and pulling -- but still the rock wouldn't budge

The distraught girl hung her head and bit her lip, fighting tears

--her mother came over and slung an arm about her slumped shoulders

"Darling," she said, "you *still* haven't used all your strength. You haven't
asked me to help"

Some of us -- Most of us -- have a hard time asking for help

Somehow we got the idea we're supposed to be all-sufficient

--but then COVID-19 comes along and takes all those old assumptions out at
the knees

The security and safety, health and success we took for granted are
suddenly in jeopardy
and in some cases, gone

--and for the first time in a long time, we recognize our need for others . . .

And our need for God

As one sister in the journey here at Knollwood told me after coming
through a
frightening illness, "I had to give up control. I had to practice being
uncertain.
I had to come to terms with letting go"

It is an unsettling fact of the life with God that the Holy Spirit can't do much with
us until we know --
in the depths of our being -- how badly we need the Spirit's Help

Like those disciples waiting for days in the Upper Room, missing Jesus,
wondering
how they will ever go on without him

Or Moses -- or maybe ourselves -- exhausted and defeated, knowing we
have
nothing more to give

--such moments crush our prideful Me-Ness and create room in our hearts
for God

That's when the One Jesus called the Paraclete --the *Helper* -- draws
near

I love the old Gospel hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus"

One wag turned that title on its head to speak a different Gospel truth: "What
a
Jesus we have in friends"

--so it is that God draws near, both in the Holy Spirit and in the presence of
our
brothers and sisters gathered 'round the Lord's Table who speak
God's truth
to us and incarnate -- *flesh-out* -- God's love for us

And that's help indeed!

Opening ourselves to God and others is the incoming tide of the Spirit's work

But there is also an outgoing tide: the giving of ourselves in service to others

--we see this outward thrust as the disciples pour out into the streets and
begin to
share the Good News of Jesus

And they do this not in their language, but in the languages of the all the
pilgrims
gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost

We see this miracle continuing today in missionaries who put down deep roots
in
native cultures and learn the customs and language of the people

We heard from four such couples earlier in the service who live and preach
the
Good News of Jesus in Spanish, Indonesian, and Swahili

But sharing the Good News is not just the work of the professionals

Rather, as the story of Pentecost makes clear, sharing the Good News of Jesus is the right and privilege of every believer

--Whom do *you* know, despairing over the COVID-19 crisis or some other personal or family ordeal who would give anything to know they are beloved of God? . . .

And that Jesus lived, died, and rose again that he might live within and walk beside them forever?

As the famed Missionary-Evangelist to India, E. Stanley Jones, wrote in *Abundant Living*,

"The early Christians did not say in dismay: 'What has the world come to!'

"They said in delight, 'Look What has come to the world!'"

"They saw not merely the ruin, but the Resource for the reconstruction of that ruin"

--even so, we are called to be a Good News People in an often Bad News World

Thus, the centrifugal force of the Gospel pushes us from the comfort zone of our Upper Room into a sometimes costly engagement with the real world

And that includes being heart-broken and incensed when yet another black man dies with the knee of racial prejudice and privilege pressing down on his neck

--I can't get past the gasping cries of George Floyd, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe!"

And not just because it was a horrific thing to witness but because that cry is emblematic of so many people of color in this country

--facing racial inequities from underperforming schools to living in food deserts to filling a preponderance of low-paying jobs, *they can't breathe*

And that includes experiencing far more illness and death from COVID-19 than whites

As one low-paid fast food worker retorted -- after being asked to wear a badge that said, "I am essential," "The truth is we're not essential; we're just expendable"

As a disciple of Jesus, I should care about that and I do

Because Pentecost looks to the day when all God's children will be free to achieve their potential and rise to their God-given vocation

--"In the last days," God declares, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh -- sons and daughters, men and women, captives and free: "In those days, I will pour out my Spirit . . . and they shall prophesy"

There's a reason a Spirit-breathed flame hovers over every head in the Upper Room

--it's because all of God's children are beloved and precious

And each has a story to tell and a gift to give

E.O. Wilson, the renowned sociobiologist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author observed

"The real problem of humanity is . . . we have paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions; and god-like technology"

Well, Pentecost aims to change all that

As the gift of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and one another helps us grow out of Me-Ness and toward a You-Ness like Christ's own

--that at last, we might rise to our high calling as disciples of Jesus:

Becoming God's agents of change in this broken but beautiful world

*Spirit Wind and Spirit Fire, surprise us anew with the force of your Presence
and
the Power of your love.*

*Then send us spilling into the streets with the Good News of Jesus, hoping
and
working for the day when all God's children will live in justice, love,
and peace.*

AMEN!

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