

“Your Advocate”

Acts 2:1-21

27 May 2007 – Pentecost C

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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.’

Prayer.

“Hope that gas tank is full,”
my future father-in-law stated,

as his head snapped downward.

“It cost just as much to have a full tank
as it does an empty one.”

“Yes, sir,” I stammered,

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“I’ll have Cynthia home safe and sound.”
I may not be the sharpest tool in the chest,
but I’m not the dullest, either.

Full.

My mother often wondered
if I was full of something
in the early years of my childhood.
“Goodness, gracious!
Has the devil gotten into you, Todd?”
my mother would respond
... if not once a day,
then ten or more.
I had a propensity for tearing things
apart.
Not to be destructive, mind you.
Rather, I was born curious
and I just had to know how things
worked.
It was the putting things back together,
that I found difficult.

Full.

What are you full of?

It seems to me that the world
is full of people
who are full of themselves.
And when you are full of yourself,
it is hard to be full of anything else.
A leading actor with
a leading actress on his arm
smiles for the paparazzi
as cameras flash
and the couple spins slowly
such that every photo is a keeper
on the red carpet
of a world premier.
Hollywood is the easy target;
the much more difficult
is when the target
is right in here

(pointing towards the heart).
Oh, how we are so full of ourselves.
Instead of pointing the finger at anyone
else

I’ll ask us all to consider
how full we are of ourselves.
Too often, when I’ve asked,
“how are you doing?”
I’m thinking to myself
how can I tell you about myself?
my troubles?
my accomplishments?
my boastings and brags?
Too often, I don’t want to know
how you are doing,
I’m too self absorbed for that;
the only thing I want you to know
is how I’m doing.
Too often, this is my own devil
I’m trying to keep in a box;
forcing myself,
making myself
to keep my mouth shut
and to do nothing
but listen.

Full.

What are you full of?
Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?
Are you like those disciples of Jesus
locked behind closed doors
in that Upper Room
afraid of your own shadow?
Or, are you like those disciples of Christ
who experienced a
life changing
faith forming
moment at the beginning of belief?
Have you felt the movement
of the Spirit within you;
like a mother in her third trimester
carrying an over-achiever,
the disquieting moment of awareness
that you are not alone

.... that God is with you
and is in you?

Hallelujah!
that is a moment!

I've felt that moment:
when an evangelist,
a retired Dallas Cowboys
football star,
by the name of Billy Glass,
made the altar call 40 years ago
in the middle of Alan Park
in the City of Jamestown
and, I,
a boy of five or six
heard the call of Christ
and I came forward.
Hallelujah!
I felt that moment
as a second year college student
on a campus life retreat
when twenty or so of my peers
and clergy reached out
and touched a part of my body
... a shoulder, the top of my head, my
arm ...
anything they could touch or hold,
and prayed for me
and about my call to ministry
as I knelt in tears in the center
of the retreat house.
Hallelujah!
that was a moment!

I felt that moment
when Bishops Ward, Yeakel, and Stith
pushed my head down in submission
at my ordination.
It was as real as a kick in the pants
as heavy as a 24 inch cinder-block
being dropped onto my shoulders,
but, yes, I did,
yes, I felt the movement of the Spirit

moving in my life
on that grand and glorious day in 1986.
Hallelujah!
that was a moment!

I felt that moment
just this past week
leading the devotions for our leadership
team;
asking,
probing,
inquiring about a personal prayer life,
rooted in last week's tag line
"for what do you pray?"

Full.
What are you full of?
Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?
Do you experience
the chrisms
and the presence
of the Holy Spirit
in the lives of others?

This may be one of the greatest
leaps of faith,
when the journey with Jesus
makes its greatest advance;
when one can look
beyond the Spirit working within the self,
and experience the fullness
of it working in the lives of others.
I'm here to tell you that
this is a beautiful thing.
"Divided tongues,
as of fire,"
the text reads,
"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."

Having sat for so many years
on credentialing committees in the
church
it never ceased to amaze me
the number of people
who would come before us,
all excited to share with us
and the world
about their personal call to parish
ministry.
And who were we
to intercede between the call of the
Spirit,
on the one hand,
and the response of the disciple,
on the other?!!!
So many candidates never made the
connection,
and were never forwarded
to the next phase of ordination,
the recognition of the community ...
of the Holy Spirit coming and moving
in the community
to either affirm
or to reject
an individual's personal call.
"God may be speaking to you
but she's not saying a word to me,"
I've often thought.

To arrogantly think that God
doesn't act or move through others;
that the Holy Spirit isn't alive and well
in communities of race and culture,
gender and diversity,
than, buddy,
you've cut yourself off
from the very
God you're attempting to hold close.
As singer, songwriter, Susan Werner
asks,
"If God is great,
and God is good,
why is your heaven so small?"

This is why all Christian communities
are called to listen, reflect, discern
the movement of the Holy Spirit
within their midst.
It is just as important for me
to experience the Spirit working within
you,
as it is for you to experience
the Spirit working within me.

In my experience
of working with and serving on behalf of
many different faith communities,
I've learned that the Holy Spirit
isn't democratically elected.
Neither is the Spirit of Christ
the popular choice.
Always,
and without exception,
it is my experience
that, like scripture assures us,
"the Spirit blows where it wills
...but [we] do not know where it comes
from
or where it goes,
so it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
(John 3: 8)
The Holy Spirit has a mind of its own;
it is the mind and will of a Heavenly
Father
who tenderly loves us
... loves us like a mother loving her
newborn.
Sometimes the will of the Spirit
is one and the same with our will;
indeed, this might be what Methodism's
John Wesley knew as perfection,
but other times,
we might find ourselves diametrically
opposed.
I can give you no cause or reason.
I am a pastor without answers;
nothing other than the Gospel in one
hand

and this encouragement in the other:
Stop.
Step back from the noise of the world.
Listen.
Take the time to listen to others.
And be aware;
be aware of the Spirits movement,
attempt to become one with its will,
and you will be
the faithful disciple
Jesus Christ has called you to be.

Full.
What are you full of?
Are you filled with the Holy Spirit?
Do you experience
the chrisms
and the presence
of the Holy Spirit
in the lives of others?
My prayer
is that it might be so with you
this Pentecost
and always.
Amen.