

A Pandemonium of Praise

[Text - Acts 2:1-21]

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Although Pentecost Sunday is a great time to talk about the Holy Spirit, it's an even greater time to celebrate how the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us. In *Acts* Chapter 2, we hear about the "mighty wind" that sweeps through the house where Jesus' followers are gathered. Each person present is touched by a "fiery tongue", and they begin to boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus in words and ways that are new and foreign to them. This flame of enthusiasm then pours into the streets, spreads throughout the entire city, and eventually, throughout the entire world.

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, you and I can also experience the Holy Spirit speaking to us in fresh and exciting ways. We can hear the ancient words of Sacred Scripture come to life, through the Spirit's inspiration and insight. We can recognize the voice of our Still-Speaking God in the words and wisdom of contemporary authors. And we can both hear and feel the Spirit's Presence, in and among this welcoming and inclusive Family of Faith.

This morning you and I have the added bonus of celebrating the Spirit's communicating to us through the words and music of our choirs and musicians. The *inspiration* - the in-breathing - of the Spirit, in the texts, and textures, and tones of skillful compositions, often stir and elevate our hearts in ways that mere words simply cannot. And though he doesn't like to be singled-out, our own Dave Debick is truly an instrument through whom the Holy Spirit speaks and inspires. Week after week, Dave and his cohorts present a rich variety of powerful and meaningful musical offerings. Plus, his ability to encourage the participation of people of all ages and *any* level of musical talent, bears witness to the Spirit's gracious and inclusive Nature. Here at BUCC, we are truly blessed that the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us through that universal language of music, and through the diverse gifts of our dedicated musicians.

Another way in which the Holy Spirit speaks to us today, is through the pure joy that emanates from our children. Some of them enthusiastically participate in our Recorder/Dulcimer group or with special percussion pieces. Others faithfully raise their praise with our Joyful Noise Choir. During Coffee Hour, many of them remind us that it's O.K. to make a joyful noise to God in any situation! Jesus reminds us that the pathway to the Realm of God can only be discovered when we are willing to become "like a little child". Therefore, our children who embody that Divine sense of freedom, openness, and joy, are wonderful witnesses of the Holy Spirit's call to liberation, acceptance, and welcome. They aren't overly self-conscious; but they are overtly *other*-conscious - happily including those they know, and those they don't know, in their playful post-worship pandemonium!

In this morning's Continuing Testament, Eric Barreto writes, "The story of Pentecost helps us understand how God sees human diversity: as one of God's greatest gifts to the world. At Pentecost, God embraces the fact that we are all so wonderfully different.... The problem we face across cultures, is not our differences. It's when we imbue those differences with judgements and prejudice; when our differences become a way to determine who is in and who is out - who is better and who is inferior. It is then that we corrupt the Divine Gift of Diversity."

There are certainly many fearful forces in this world that seek to build tensions and drive wedges between cultural subsets, such as Black and White, Christian and Muslim, straight and gay, left and right - as if people were categorically polar opposites. There *is* a divisive spirit that deludes us into thinking that those who are different from us in any way, are different from us in every way. Fortunately, there is also a Divine Spirit who assures us that "different" does not mean "deficient". A Holy Spirit who strives to make people holy, and to make people *whole* - to remind us that at our core, we are *all* God's beloved daughters and sons.

On that Pentecost long ago, the Holy Spirit gathered people from many different cultures, languages and backgrounds, and brought them together as One. On this Pentecost, we also come from many different places and backgrounds to form our *United* Church of Christ Congregation. Every few years, I like to do something that provides a visual image of how wonderfully the Holy Spirit has orchestrated our coming together. We may not come from Mesopotamia or Cappadocia, Phrygia or Pamphylia [wherever the heck that is]; but we do come from a variety of places and backgrounds. So to get a snapshot of how the Spirit continues to call and gather people from all kinds of backgrounds, I'd like you to stand, as you are able, to signify where the Holy Spirit's work began in your life.

If you were born after 1957, and raised in the present day United Church of Christ, please stand. If your background was with the earlier Congregational Christian Church or Evangelical/Reformed...Lutherans... Presbyterians... No particular church background...United Methodist or Brethren...Buddhist...Baptist...Orthodox...Muslim... Christian Science...Episcopal...Disciples of Christ.. Roman Catholic...

As we can see, it is from a wide variety of backgrounds and traditions that the Holy Spirit brings you and me together to this time and place. Yet regardless of our differences, we are all One in the Spirit! And through the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, you and I are empowered to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in ways that are universally understood: The language of music and praise, the language of joy and compassion, and above all, the language of extravagant welcome and inclusive love.

It really would have been astounding to see and hear those early believers speaking in other languages, as the Spirit inspired them. So many different people, speaking so many different, complex languages. Yet the purpose was quite simple. The work of the Spirit on that Pentecost was to make sure that everyone was included, and that no one miss out on the Good News of Jesus. I believe that the Holy Spirit desires the same thing on *this* Pentecost: That when this

worship service concludes, you and I continue to make a joyful noise to God - a Pandemonium of Praise! One that catches people's attention and lets them know that God is Still Speaking through us, and through our acts of compassion, service, and gracious welcome.