

“A Grand Entrance“  
Acts 2:1-21  
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Pentecost Sunday  
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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.”

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Grand entrances. They fascinate me. From singers ziplining onto a stage at the beginning of a rock concert to elaborately costumed celebrities’ arrival on the red carpet, I admit I am one who is fascinated by the lengths some people go through to get people’s attention. But in my world, nowhere are grand entrances more appreciated than on the college football field. Full of tradition and intended to hype up the crowd, schools employ all kinds of amazing and sometimes even crazy tactics: At the University of Oregon they ride their mascot, a duck, into the stadium on the back of a Harley; The University of Hawaii revs up the crowd with the whole football team performing a traditional island Haka dance; Auburn University flies in their “war” eagle; the University of Colorado runs in behind Ralphie their 1200 pound stampeding buffalo; just down the street at Ohio State crowds go wild when a carefully selected ambassador dots the i of the band’s Script Ohio; and my personal favorite, the frenzy built by the band playing 2001: a Space Odyssey and at the pinnacle of the song – cannons shoot off, fireworks explode, and 83000 people erupt in support of their beloved South Carolina Gamecocks who come running onto the field en mass. As one who married into the South Carolina tradition, I was skeptical of all its show...but from that very first time, and now each time that follows, I find my arms covered in goosebumps and a heart full of pride as I am wrapped up in the swell of school spirit. Yep – these grand entrances are impressive.

Making a grand entrance is precisely what Luke’s witness of that First Pentecost is all about. Luke does not want the reader of Acts to miss the importance of the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It is a big deal!

In the first chapter of Acts, we learn that the disciples have remained in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus before he ascended to be with God. They are holed up in a room – waiting. Now the larger Jewish community has gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate The Feast of Weeks which celebrates God giving the 10 Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai. As one of the larger festivals, people would travel considerable distances to celebrate in Jerusalem and because of the timing of the festival corresponded with good travel conditions, there was a larger than usual crowd. Add to it the law that no work should be done on that day resulting in a large, economically and geographically diverse crowd gathered in Jerusalem.

And a crowd of this size would have created a considerable amount of noise on their own. I imagine it like our passing of the peace when we greet one another in love. This movement and conversation creating the normal buzz of a lively congregation. Now magnify that a few times and you get the idea of the noise present on that day.

In the middle of all of this, wind rushes in. A rush of violent wind filled the place where they were gathered. Perhaps similar to the gusts we experience as a storm is quickly approaching. Then tongues of fire dancing and flickering until resting upon each one gathered there. That once chattering crowd stopped and followed the wind to where the disciples and others gathered. This must have rendered the crowd speechless – startled by the gust and the flames – and left them watching in fear and apprehension as well as awe and wonder.

As if the visual was not enough, then people began speaking. Not in the universal Greek language of the time, but in their native tongues – Luke records 16 different languages represented there but it is likely even more. All at once these voices were speaking the languages of their homelands and they were not politely taking turns but rather speaking all at once.

Can you imagine the cacophony of voices? That rich layering of sounds – building upon each other...yet for some reason among this great sound, those present were able to clearly decipher the spoken message of their own native tongue. They were able to discern clearly the people speaking of the wonders of God. Somehow and in some way, all the disciples were granted the ability to share what they knew and had experienced of God through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ. And somehow everyone gathered heard it and understood what was said! It must have been amazing....and then it was over almost as quickly as it started. When they were finally able to put it all together - The reaction of the gathered crowd was mixed: some were amazed and perplexed trying to determine what had just happened and what it meant, while others were quick to blow off the experience as the effects of very potent alcohol.

It is such an odd story! It sounds like a Hollywood Blockbuster complete with pyrotechnics and Oscar worthy special effects. Many biblical scholars believe Luke took liberties and slightly embellished this Pentecost account. But he does so to make a point. He wants the reader to pay attention and to note this – this passage is different. It is important! It is a Grand Entrance meant to convey The Holy Spirit is here! The Advocate that Jesus promised the disciples would come to them, is here!

This FIRST Pentecost reminds us God is, yet again, breaking into the world in unexpected ways and acting through unexpected actions. At this first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God, entered the world and came to stay, to rest with and to breathe life into this new and unique community

of faith that was forming. Much like God breathed into creation in Genesis and created order from chaos, God is now breathing the Holy Spirit into disciples and the church. With one breath this new and unique community of faith comes to life and is equipped with gifts to help spread God's love throughout the world. The Holy Spirit empowers the disciples and the community that follows them to continue the work began in Jesus Christ.

And in the very next chapters of Acts, Luke tells us the disciples begin to call others to join them in ministry; they baptize those gathered; they heal persons who are hurting; they share food and resources. In short, they use the gift of love Jesus showed them, and the Holy Spirit has now empowered them, to use to continue to spread the ministry of Christ throughout the world.

We know through the remainder of Acts and through the letters of the New Testament that the community grows and the word of God spreads and the church of Jesus Christ moves into the world and the church. We understand that Holy Spirit that made Her grand entrance on the first Pentecost continues to fill us in the world today. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the church along using the power given by God to us – and somehow this fractured community full of all different and amazing people is drawn together to follow the Spirit and live as God's servants in the world. This Holy Spirit comes to us and infuses us with the ability to share the living witness of the life of Jesus Christ – to share the love of God.

The news that the Holy Spirit is present today is not news to most of you – my goodness we beat you over the head with it almost every week. But there is a reason for that. You see, those gathered on that first Pentecost day were able to see the Spirit – they were able to see wind-like and fire-like signs; they were able to see the Holy Spirit. While they may not have fully grasped what was happening, they did have the benefit of witnessing that awe-inspiring event and being moved forward and out by the energy Pentecost created.

But for us today, we rarely see the Holy Spirit manifested in that way. We don't often feel the rush of wind in our worship or seen flames dancing over our heads, and I doubt you have heard little else than English from this pulpit. If the Spirit came to the church 2000 years ago, how do we know the Spirit is still with us. How do we know the Spirit is with us when our world feels anything other than spirit filled?

When people, including many young girls are targeted in a bombing attack at a rock concert and then that same city has another terrorist attack on a major tourist site, where is that Holy Spirit? When a single young mother is bedbound and dying and can't take care of her children and does not have any family who will do so, where is that Holy Spirit? When our state – and so many others – continue to struggle with an out of control opiate epidemic, where is that Holy Spirit?

When I struggle with questions like these, I turn to the voices of those I know. Shirley Guthrie – one of my seminary professors – offers these thoughts ...

*“The Holy Spirit of this God enables people not to escape from the world but to live in it in such a way that not only their personal lives but also the world around them begins to be made new. Truly spiritual people are recognized not just by how much they pray but by how much they pray for the world. They are recognized not just by how much they “praise the Lord” for what “The Lord has done for me”,*

*but by how sensitive their protection of the natural environment in which they live. They are recognized not just by how much they read the Bible but by how their Bible reading influences their business practices, political commitments, and social relationships. A spirituality that retreats from the world into the self-serving safety of a private religious life is a false spirituality that flees the Spirit of God. True Christian spirituality cheerfully and confidently plunges into the life of this world; for there is where we meet the Spirit of the God of the Bible who is at work not to save us from but in - and for the sake - of the world.”<sup>i</sup>*

The Holy Spirit came 2000 years ago to ignite that community of faith. To give them gifts to love and serve, to gather them up and send them out and touch the world with the love of God. The Holy Spirit does not promise to make a grand entrance again...but, if we open our eyes we may see and even be called to participate in its work.

You may have seen this on social media, but back in March, a visibly upset woman came through the drive thru line at a Dutch Brothers Coffee shop in Vancouver, WA. An employee noticed she was crying and asked if all was okay. The customer replied her husband had just died. The employee said he was so sorry and asked how he could help her. The customer just cried. But the employee asked her if she was a praying woman. She said yes and he grabbed her hands and started praying...and then, without invitation, the other 2 employees stopped what they were doing and joined in that prayer right there during the morning rush at a local coffee drive thru. A photo was snapped by the driver in the car behind them and it immediately went viral. In the follow-up story in a local paper, we learned that while one of the employees was a Christian, the other two employees were not. But they all realized on that day – at that time – the woman in the car needed people to pray with her and regardless of what we believe, she needed us to do that for her on that day. And we were certainly willing to be that for her. Yes – the Holy Spirit is present. <sup>ii</sup>

There’s a pastor in New England who asked his fellow pastor how her building campaign was doing. She responded “Oh, we ran out of money before we got to the worship space,” she said. I thought to myself, “What could be more important than the worship space?” but I kept my thoughts to myself. She went on “We renovated the basement. You know, we have a shelter there for homeless men. We put in new showers and renovated the old kitchen. The basement was so drab, and the showers – well, there was only one shower and it was lousy. On the Sunday before the shelter opened, the worship service began as usual in the sanctuary. When it came time for communion, the people carried the bread and the cup downstairs to the basement. The whole congregation gathered around the empty beds. They passed the bread and the cup around the circle. The body of Christ given for you. That night the shelter beds were full, and the worship space still needed a lot of work.” The church calendar said it was the first Sunday of Advent but people in that congregation knew that Pentecost wasn’t over.<sup>iii</sup> Yes – the Holy Spirit is present.

Two summers ago, our annual youth mission trip was in Asheville, NC. We had been serving at the Haywood Street Ministry – a care center for homeless persons where they can get a hot meal, get their haircut, get clean clothes, use a clean restroom, gather and visit and hang out and know they won’t be run-off by the police. While there, we met Raven, a young women haunted by the demons of addiction.

She talked with us about those demons – took us into her world – and even prayed with us. And then got up and left to go meet her dealer. On that same day we were there, Haywood Street also had a worship service – the Haywood Street congregation is an amazing varied fellowship with persons from the street, and the business community, to families with children. It truly is a cross section of Asheville. I was honored to be asked to serve as the minister over the communion table – I led our familiar Presbyterian liturgy reminding all of the breadth and width and depth of God’s love and invitation to every single person there to come be a part of the feast God offers us. Then I sat down as the servers from the congregation made their way forward. I sat for a few minutes giving thanks to God for not stumbling on the words, for not spilling when I poured, and well, for not praying something ridiculous in my prayer. Basically, I sat there and focused on me. As I stood to take communion, I pulled a piece of bread from the loaf which was held by weathered and worn hands, and looked up to meet the eyes of Raven who said, God’s body broken for you. Yes – the Holy Spirit is certainly present.

Friends, the Holy Spirit made Her entrance 2000 years ago and is still here in this place in you and me. The Holy Spirit doesn’t reside in a building; She resides in each of us – placed here in one breath by our Creator. And She is guiding us, leading us, and already inspiring us to share the very love of God with each and every person we meet. The Spirit is surely moving here at Overbrook...and working to get our attention each and every day. May we be inspired enough to keep moving with that Spirit... and have insight, faith and the willingness to recognize and follow where it leads.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Guthrie, Shirley Christian Doctrine. Westminster-John Knox. Louisville, KY. 1994. pg.300.

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.oregonlive.com/faith/2016/03/dutch\\_bros\\_prayer.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/faith/2016/03/dutch_bros_prayer.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Lundblad, Barbara. Marking Time: Preaching Biblical Stories in Present Tense. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 2007.