

“All of Them”
A Sermon by Rev. Victoria ByRoade
Pentecost Sunday
May 31, 2009
Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: *Lord Jesus, as we hear and think about your Word to us today, embolden us to testify in your name, to tell the whole world about your mighty works, to be your mighty works, your courageous prophets, and your tellers of the truth. Amen.*

Luke begins his account of Pentecost by saying that, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.” Isn’t that sort of like us? Like those pilgrims assembled in Jerusalem for the great festival, we have come from many different places – not only geographically, but also spiritually. And to those gathered that Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended, and they all began to speak, began to proclaim “the mighty works of God.”

Maybe you thought that proclamation was limited to preachers like me – people whom God and the church have called into the ministry of preaching. Well, if that is what you thought, my friends, think again.

As you likely remember, Luke begins his first volume – the Gospel of Luke – by saying that Jesus began his ministry by calling twelve people to be his first disciples. And then he sent them out to tell the mighty works of God to everyone, sent them out to preach. But now we see, after the resurrection, that the risen Christ has no intention of limiting proclamation to those twelve.

In Acts 2, the story we read this morning, this empowering, commissioning work of the Spirit is not confined to the circle of the twelve disciples. Now the Spirit is poured out on everyone. There were one hundred twenty believers present all together and, Luke tells us, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak boldly.” This Spirit, as Peter will go on to explain, is now poured out on

“all flesh.” It doesn’t matter if you are young or old. It doesn’t matter if you are male or female. You may have come here today from a powerful, wealthy family or a family of slaves. These days in most denominations there is a whole system and process for a person seeking ordination as a minister of word and sacrament. The call which the individual senses has to be confirmed and affirmed by the church. But for all you “preachers” out there called by the Holy Spirit, it really doesn’t matter whether a church body has ordained you or not. It doesn’t matter because God’s Spirit is poured out on all who call on the name of the Lord.

Luke tells us, too, that the Spirit not only enabled them to speak and to speak up, but it also enabled them to speak up “boldly”. It is a pretty well-known fact that one of people’s greatest fears is the fear of public speaking. People are more willing to do almost anything than stand in front of a group of people and speak. And yet, that is precisely the task to which we are called. As I was working on this sermon, I kept hearing in my head words from our prayer of confession last week. Maybe you remember them, too. We acknowledged that God calls us and commissions us to proclaim the good news. But we are also aware of the times we remain silent when we should whisper and times when we whisper when we should shout. Maybe that is what makes the Pentecost story so impressive. Luke says that when God poured out his spirit they could prophesy. And speak up boldly.

Do you remember how Jesus’ ministry began in Luke’s Gospel? The Spirit impelled Jesus to stand up in the synagogue and preach, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”.

Do you understand what this means? That very same Spirit is now poured out on everyone, no matter how they came to church, no

matter what their linguistic abilities or disabilities are. The Spirit enables ordinary people to do what Jesus did – to speak up boldly for God and God’s good news.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. Not just the twelve, not just the men, not just the most well-behaved, not just the most educated, not just the best-liked. All of them! Imagine with me for a moment what this congregation would look like and sound like if tongues of fire were dancing over every head and all of us – every single one of us – were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in a different language. All of us.

I wonder how many of us would immediately shut up because we didn’t want to attract attention to ourselves or because we know “that is not the way to behave in church”? How many of us would raise our voices in an attempt to drown out the words our neighbor is speaking because what they are saying doesn’t make any sense to us? How many of us would try to shush the children and teens? (Fess up here, friends, how many of you actually ever considered that the crying babies, chattering toddlers or singing teen-agers may simply be filled with the Holy Spirit?) How many of us would be wondering which paragraph in the Book of Order covers events like this and, assuming there isn’t one, starting to draft one? How many of us would be looking around wondering what the visitors are thinking?

Well, if you ask me, my friends, the message for this day is that God shows no partiality, and that all of us – children, youth, young adults, senior citizens, women, men, every single last one of us, are sitting in the midst of the sound of a mighty wind and that every single last one of us (ALL OF US!) are being filled with the Holy Spirit even as I speak. Can you hear it? If you hit the pause button on the continuous loop of internal chatter, can you hear the thundering silence (as Elijah described it)?

Just take a deep breath, close your eyes if that helps, and listen to it. Don't give up. Trust me; it is there: a whisper, a sigh, a murmur, a hum – or maybe for some of you it is even a shout or a roar.

The Holy Spirit has fallen on *you*! What is it saying or singing to you? What is it inviting *you* to say or sing to the world? Don't look at your neighbor and think I am talking to them and not to you! My experience is that the hardest thing for 95% of us to accept about the gift of the Holy Spirit is accepting that we have been entrusted with a message for the world. I have; you have; the person beside you in the pew has. And every message we have been given is different!

That means that there is no one else to speak the particular message which is entrusted to you. So...if you don't share it, who will? If you don't tell the story of how God is singing in your heart, who will? And what will happen to the person who needs to hear *your* story in order to be healed of deep despair, or comforted in grief, or encouraged in adversity or loved in loneliness, or trusted in a time of self-doubt, or challenged in a time of self-delusion?

There were a host of people gathered outside that upper room – in the taverns, in the shops, who came from many different cultures and traditions...and languages. And each of them heard the believers speaking in a language he or she could understand. In exactly the same way, there are a host of people today in the banks, the malls, the video arcades and the pubs. There are people under bridges and standing on street corners and gathered at the water-coolers who need to hear a story about hope and vision and joy and justice in a language they can understand.

That means that most of us who have been coming to church for a long time will need to leave our theological jargon right here in the sanctuary because the vast majority of those who

are un-churched in this post-Christian world have never heard those words, let alone know what they mean. We can't depend on the language we have spoken all our lives – we must trust the new one we are being given by the Holy Spirit. In fact, we may not be speaking in words at all.

The Holy Spirit may be empowering us to “speak” a casserole for CHIPS, or a weekend working at Shady Grove – the Habitat for Humanity site here in Dunedin, or a visit with an elderly neighbor who you know has no close family. You may be called to speak in silent presence, or in words, or in deeds. But whoever you are, the Holy Spirit is falling on *you*. You are being filled with the ability to speak. You are being commissioned to share the good news with a bewildered world.

In a few minutes we will be ordaining and installing people – our brothers and sisters who have accepted the fact that they have been entrusted with a message for the world. They will be asked questions and we will be asked questions. Each of them has a particular story and message to share with us and with the world. One of the most important questions you and I will be asked is if we agree to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ who alone is Head of the Church.

May it be so for you and for me.

Amen.

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