

## **“The Gift that Keeps on Giving”**

John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-21 – Tesa Hauser  
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*Holy God bless the speaking and the hearing of these words so that we will be open to gift and work of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.*

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We aren't given much information or a detailed explanation about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, but the event in the book of Acts reminds me of a flash mob. The sudden movements and actions of those who received the Spirit remind me of a flash mob. They go from being in one room together to being outside with a large group of people, speaking different languages, and the people around them are utterly confused that they respond scoffing, thinking they must be drunk.

If you have seen a flash mob in person, you are usually confused about what is going on at first. Even in flash mob videos, the crowd doesn't know what is happening, and their faces show their confusion. There is no reasonable explanation for what the flash mob people are doing, but then it turns into this event of people dancing and sometimes singing, which evokes excitement. I acknowledge this example is not perfect, but the events of Pentecost are wild! Acts 2:2-3 says, there was “suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind” and “tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.” A violent wind is startling and surprising, and who knows what tongues of fire look like. However, I

think it is a wonderful description of the work of the Holy Spirit. Unsuspecting, startling, and no idea of what the possibilities are or the outcome.

The story of Acts is the second part or continuation of the Gospel of Luke, and this author often shows how God intervenes into human affairs, or as one commentary I read stated, an “inbreaking of heaven into human affairs.” It is a way to say that God meets us where we are at, and when that occurs, sometimes wonderful and extraordinary things happen. We see this in the story of John. The community of disciples, not just the twelve, are hiding from the religious, Jewish authorities. They don’t believe Mary’s account in the previous verses about the risen Christ since, at that time, a woman’s testimony would have been ignored. Jesus, like an apparition, appears to the disciples and welcomes them with a greeting they would know, “peace be with you!” They can accept this “person” knowing they come in peace, but don’t know who it is until he shows them his hands and his side, at which point, the disciples can rejoice when they recognize it is “the Lord” or Jesus.

Then Jesus repeats, "peace be with you." Jesus is not greeting them once more but affirming what he has promised in what is known as his Farewell Discourse in chapter 14. In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit and to provide them with a peace that is unlike the world's peace. Jesus isn't upset they are hiding and afraid about their current situation but reminds them about his

promises. I am not a betting person but would bet that the last thing the disciples thought would occur on that day is that Jesus would appear to them in that room. They saw him dead, they laid him in the tomb, and now he is standing in front of them doing the very things he said he would.

In the Gospel of John, the receiving of the Holy Spirit occurs on the evening of Easter Sunday! I had never noticed this before! The beginning of this community of Christ is not a separate event like in Luke, but that new life is available on resurrection day. Even though on Saturday there is mourning, on Sunday there is a joy that Jesus promised, new life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The verb “to breathe” occurs only here in the Christian Scriptures, and its usage evokes the descriptions of God’s breathing the breath of life into the first human in Genesis 2:7. Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on his disciples in commentaries is described as a new, second creation. This new creation is one of diversity and welcoming the stranger and the foreigner.

The Pentecost story in Acts is different but confirms this statement. The gift of the Holy Spirit allows for people to speak a language other than their own. For heaven to inbreak into the earth, into communities, into ideas of those “in” and “out.” It is further confirmed throughout Acts as this community of believers reconciles with Gentile believers and realizes they are also a part of this new

community. Their idea of this Christian community will look and sound completely different than the one they had expected.

Peter's sermon after the event shares how the work of the Holy Spirit will not always be well-received. Those who do not have authority will prophesy; to those who are outsiders, the Holy Spirit will be gifted, and wonders and signs that sound outrageous will occur. The limitation we put on God's work in the Holy Spirit will be broken and surpassed. What if we lived our faith like that? Imagined the Holy Spirit working in extraordinary ways, in ways we could not understand?

For my recent meeting with Committee on Ministry on my path towards ordination, I was asked to name historical events in the Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that impact my faith and ministry. In general Church history, I said the Azusa Street Revival of 1906. An event that happened on Azusa Street in Los Angeles where the Holy Spirit moved, and many turned their hearts and lives to the ministry of Jesus Christ. That event formed the denominations and congregations I attended as a young person and where I was nurtured as a Christian. In those spaces, God found me, called me, and I credit them for why I am standing here preaching in front of you today.

The event within the Disciples of Christ I named was the Revival of 1933 in Puerto Rico. A congregation in Puerto Rican experienced the Holy Spirit in new and different ways than those that the missionaries had brought over. The

missionaries were upset that people were worshiping and said to experience God in new ways; they tried to stop what was going on. The missionaries later apologized for how they responded. I believe it was the work of the Holy Spirit that I attended a Christian High School that again prepared my path for ministry. That journey was difficult for me, and it isn't incredibly outrageous or movie-worthy, but it changed my life. The work of the Holy Spirit won't always be well-received.

The Holy Spirit has been at work since the beginning of history. Over history it has been a gift that keeps on giving life, newness, freshness, and a boldness that is bewildering. The section in the gospel of John ends with Jesus telling the disciples to forgive. However, this doesn't mean that we are forgiving people for their moral failings but are bearing witness to the identity of the one who can forgive sins, God who is revealed in Jesus. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are a part of the gift, and what does it look like to be a gift to the world? Loving one another as Jesus loves; sharing the gospel in grace and with creativity, in word and action. It isn't just an individual mandate; it is given to the faith community, to the whole Church. We all bear witness to the gift of the Holy Spirit, individually and together. Most importantly, these gifts, forgiveness, newness, life, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are gifted by God with the only ask being to share them, as they were given freely and abundantly.

What does it look like to share these gifts freely and abundantly? Does this mean providing resources for those immigrating to find a better life, even if we don't agree with their methods? Does it mean advocating for everyone to have easy and affordable access to health care so that they can have a chance to live life, not just try to survive? The Holy Spirit is at work today, has been at work, and will continue to be at work; will we be open to seeing and sharing in that work?

Alleluia and amen.