5-31-20 A New Step of Faith Rev. Amy Haines

Acts 2:1-21 Pentecost Sunday

They waited together. They prayed and remembered. They reflected on the past and imagined what was still to come. Yet, when the day came, reality was nothing they envisioned.

Have you ever felt that way, waiting to experience a milestone in your life?

Your graduation day; Your wedding day; The birth of a child; A significant birthday

We wait and we imagine, yet reality is often very different than what we expected.

Sometimes, reality is a let down from what we dreamed.

How many children finish opening their presents on Christmas Day, then declare, “Is that all?”

How many couples spend months planning for a wedding day that goes by in a blur and a blink?

Sometimes, reality is better than what we could ever imagine.

The wonder of holding a newborn baby; The experiences on a trip of a lifetime

And on that Pentecost morning long ago, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

50 days after Jesus’ resurrection, 10 days after Jesus’ ascension, the followers of Jesus were gathered together in one place. Praying. Remembering. Imagining. Waiting. They numbered about 120, including men and women. They had elected Matthias as the 12th apostle, to take the place of Judas.

They knew Jesus had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, his abiding presence to guide them and remind them of all that Jesus had taught them.

Yet, when the day came, reality was nothing they envisioned.

“Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.” (CEB 2-4)

The Holy Spirit showed up in a mighty way!

A rushing wind, such as we might hear in the midst of a storm or prior to a tornado.

Tongues of flame alighting, or resting, on each of them, like the tendrils of a vine reaching out to each one.

And a rich diversity of language that made everyone in Jerusalem sit up and take notice. Jews from all over the known world, present for the Jewish harvest festival known as Pentecost,

heard God praised in their native tongues from a ragtag group of men and women, rural fishermen and former tax collectors.

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—all heard the disciples speaking about God’s deeds of power in their own languages.

All who heard such a commotion were amazed, astonished, and perplexed! Nowadays such a scene would go viral in less than a day, with many more wondering how such a feat would be possible.

A miracle of language. A miracle of hearing. A miracle created only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The followers of Jesus burst forth from behind closed doors to boldly proclaim God’s mighty deeds of power. These same men who less than 55 days prior had denied and deserted Jesus

were now boldly proclaiming the good news of a crucified and risen Savior and Lord. These same women who had journeyed with Jesus throughout the past three years were also recognized as Jesus’ followers.

Peter quoted the prophet Joel to make sense of what everyone was seeing and experiencing in that moment:

“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.” (v17)

In that moment, everything changed, through the power of the Spirit.

The disciples were transformed from timid followers to bold messengers of God’s good news, proclaiming to all the significance of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

And as they began to proclaim the good news of Jesus, that good news began to spread not only to all in Jerusalem that day, but throughout Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

As David Lose proclaims:

..Before long the disciples were going places they have no right to go, saying things they shouldn’t be saying, to people they wouldn’t formerly have dreamt of encountering,

let alone challenging. This is all because of the Spirit we call Holy.

-- Davidlose.net 5-14-13

Pentecost was a new beginning for those first disciples of Jesus. Pentecost was a new step in faith, following a crucified and risen and ascended Jesus. Pentecost was their moment to begin to live for Jesus wholeheartedly, with all of their hearts and minds and lives, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And because of their devotion and obedience, you and I are able to worship Jesus today.

Are we ready to follow them? Are we ready for a new step of faith, following the Holy Spirit into an unknown, yet God-filled future?

Luke’s story of the Holy Spirit’s coming at Pentecost is a promise of an unknown future, guided by an all-knowing God. The disciples that day didn’t know that they would all be tortured for their faith; they only knew that they had a message that could not be silenced, a message of good news of a Savior for all people. And so they opened themselves to the holy spirit of God,

opened themselves to being led by the Spirit, and became God’s messengers to the world.

Are we ready to do the same? Are we ready to be led by the Spirit? Are we willing to proclaim the good news of Jesus in the ways the Spirit leads us?

Last year on Pentecost, I invited our congregation to continue to pray a breakthrough prayer for our future. As the church in 2020 looks nothing like anyone expected, I invite you to reflect on the timelessness of our breakthrough prayer.

*Faithful God, pour out your Holy Spirit on us, to lead us into a new season as your church.*

*Breakthrough what holds us back from living for you in our lives and in our congregation.*

*Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, faith to respond, and the courage to follow where you lead. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

That prayer is still relevant for our life and ministry together today!

As we seek to take our next steps of faith, be mindful that we cannot go back to the way things have always been. The church of the future will not look like the church of the past.

In the past three months, we have moved out of this building, and been reminded that the church is not about where we meet, but about who we are.

How have we been the church caring for one another?

How have we been the church caring for our community?

In what ways have we failed to be the hands and feet of Christ?

In what ways have we been complacent in our faith journeys?

May we continue to live into our identity as the church, the body of Christ in this world.

In the past three months, we have moved into online ministry, which cannot stop once we re-gather in person. I love how some of our older members have embraced new technology!

How do we continue to connect with one another online as well as in person?

If you feel comfortable, next week invite someone to watch online worship with you, maybe someone who cannot connect to this medium. Or call up a church friend next Sunday afternoon

and share your God sighting from worship that morning.

May God speak through this new technology so that the timeless good news can still be heard.

In the past three months, we have seen the growing divisions around us and among us. We may all be in the same pandemic storm, but we are definitely not all in the same boat. We have seen the struggles of neighbors living paycheck to paycheck, both those furloughed and those deemed essential workers. We have seen the tension between following health orders and personal rights. And we have seen the struggle to honor the humanity of all persons, from nursing home residents to Native Americans to those living in poverty to African Americans.

How is God calling us as the church to honor and value all lives right now, but especially those who are tired of feeling forgotten, or cast aside, or killed due to the color of their skin?

Rev. Derek Weber invites us to speak new languages this Pentecost season, empowered by the Spirit:

Instead of languages of hurt and anger and revenge, may we become fluent in forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead of limitation and doubt and anxiety, may we speak hope and joy like natives. Instead of accusation and blame, may love roll off our tongues as though we were born to it, with a perfect accent as though it were a part of us.

--Derek Weber 5-31-20 umcdiscipleship.org, adapted

As we move into a new season as the church, as we live more deeply as the people of God in this world, our next steps of faith may not be easy. Change is never easy.

We won’t all agree on the ways to re-open our building safely. It’s hard to be a welcoming church when not all feel welcome due to safety restrictions.

We won’t all agree on the ways to speak into the struggles of our world. It’s hard to follow Jesus and not be accused of being political when we’re trying to honor the *Imago Dei* in all humankind.

New steps of faith take trust and confidence in the One whom we follow.

For the Spirit will move us beyond our comfort zones.

The Spirit will insist we use our gifts for mission and ministry.

The Spirit will change our understanding of what it means to be the church.

The Spirit will call us to embrace as brothers and sisters in Christ

those who look differently or speak differently or think differently than us.

..As James Jones once wrote,

“The question is not whether the church will be renewed. Of course it will be; the Spirit is at work. The only question is whether you and I will prove a hindrance or a channel to God’s activity.” -Robert Kopp “Letting the Pentecostal Winds Blow” preaching.com

When we seek to be channels for the Spirit, consider the possibilities:

Children feel loved

Elderly feel valued

Hope is restored

New relationships are formed

Transformation occurs

Grace is embraced

Salvation is found

Today, Jesus invites us to be a channel of God’s activity, open to the Holy Spirit moving in and through and among us. Today, Jesus invites us to remember our mission is to be and make disciples for the transformation of the world. The church does not exist for our own comfort.

Today, Jesus invites us to step out in faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to move from hate to love; from fear to faith; from despair to hope. May we be open to these next steps of faith, open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and grace, open to moving in ways we never dreamed we would go in order to follow Jesus.

*Faithful God, pour out your Holy Spirit on us, to lead us into a new season as your church.*

*Breakthrough what holds us back from living for you in our lives and in our congregation.*

*Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, faith to respond, and the courage to follow where you lead.*

*We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*