

Acts 2: 1-15

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

Trinity Presbyterian Church

June 4, 2017

Pentecost Sunday

“A Divine Disturbance: Living in the Spirit of Confusion”

Intro: It has been a few days since Jesus has left the building. His body carried off into the atmosphere like a liberated balloon. The disciples stay put as Jesus has told them to wait for the coming of the Spirit. So they pray a little. Wait some more. Then Peter, who has had enough waiting, stands up and calls a meeting to order. Announces that the incident with Judas was unfortunate, but his absence has left a void that needs to be filled. So they pray and cast lots, it lands on Matthias and just as the clerk of Session adds his name to the Book of Disciples, a violent wind sweeps through. Fire falls on their heads and they begin to speak in foreign languages. This is not an ordinary day. People on the outside hear the noise as they are passing by and are amazed. Remember why were they amazed? Because they heard the good news in their native tongue. Yes, it was as if God was speaking directly to them.

Move 1: We have experienced the Spirit speaking. We’ve had moments where it was as if the Spirit was speaking directly to us. Of course, we probably have not experienced our hair on fire or spontaneously tonguing a foreign speech, but we’ve heard the good news spoken into our lives—in our language. If you’ve preached a sermon before, you know there is a sacred space between the preacher’s mouth and the listener’s ears. Somehow the Spirit helps them to hear what they need to. A pastor tells a story about a woman who walked through the greeting line thanking her for her powerful message. As tears misted in her eyes she said, “It was exactly what I needed to hear. I have been harboring resentful feelings toward my partner and I need to have a conversation with them. Your sermon helped me.” The

preacher ignorantly nodded thinking to herself, “But it was a stewardship sermon!” It was the word the woman needed to hear. The Spirit spoke to her. It doesn’t just happen in church either. Maybe you’re driving along in your car. Lately the stress keeps building from the job. Home life feels chaotic. Anxiety rattling through our nerves when we turn on the radio and out pops Bob Marley singing, “Don’t worry about a thing, cause every little thing’s gonna be alright.” In the moment, the words reach out and grab us. As if Spirit was speaking directly to us. Giving us the word we needed. Speaking in our language.

Move 2: Of course, scan the story and notice: there is another side to the Spirit’s personality. Not only our comforter, but our Divine disrupter as well. The Holy Spirit acting as agitator to shake things up from time to time. Take a look: she is creating problems for the church right from the beginning. Holy confusion is all over the place. Some are in awe while others are calling the disciples drunk. The disciples themselves are confused as they speak in languages they have never heard before. Then the church leaps from twelve members to over three-thousand in the matter of moments. Suddenly we have Judeans breaking bread with Romans, Egyptians praying with Asians and Arabs. The Spirit pushing enemies together who now stand side-by-side as converts are being dipped in baptismal waters. And then what do we do the next Sunday when all three-thousand come to worship? Where are they all going to park? You know that someone will be sitting in someone else’s pew seat. Then there are the mission questions: how do we feed the poor? How do we care for our aging? How do we pass down faith to the next generations? All are complicated questions the church has had to face right from the beginning because the Holy Spirit has created a mess. The Spirit is more than just our comforter. She is a trouble-maker, an agitator, a Divine disrupter.

Move 3: So now take a step back. Ask a question: What does it mean for us today? What is the Spirit pushing us to do in our time and place? The question suggests that things change. Neighborhoods cycle through. Leaders come and go. The needs of the community are anything but static. Yesterday at the Session retreat, the leaders of the church met to begin discerning where the Spirit is leading us missionally. So we asked some hard questions: What do we want to be known for that we aren’t already? What injustice burns hot in our bones? We realized that we are a church that spreads itself a mile wide, but has only been able to go an inch deep. It is code for doing too many things, but not being able to do one thing that goes deep enough to have impact in the community. We aren’t the only church who’s wrestling with the questions. At one time the Presbyterian church was the wealthiest denomination in America. We sat back, writing fat checks to charitable organizations. We built stadium seated churches fit for thousands in downtown squares. But it’s no secret we can’t function the same anymore. When we were in Detroit we strolled past a beautiful abandoned sanctuary in the middle of a neighborhood. Stain-glass windows still intact, structure still strong. But look to the bell tower and the bell is missing. It’s a metaphor for our dilemma: There are a lot of churches still hanging around, but they aren’t many making noise in their neighborhood anymore. So we too have to step back and ask, what does it mean? Where is the Spirit’s wind blowing us in our time? How do we as church keep making noise?

Move 4: Well, here’s the good news! Pentecost is now! It is not some historical event tucked away in our memories. The Spirit is speaking today. Now we might not like what she is saying, but she is still with us creating space for new things. The Pentecost news is that we are free—the direction of the church is

not up to us. It's up to God. Perhaps we think of the church like a sailboat. We open our sails to the wind, and we might not know what's coming or we may be confused or surprised, but we keep moving. Not long ago a small church like ours made a bold move. One day an elder looked out the church's window and saw the house across the street had a "For Sale" sign staked in the front yard. So the church looked into it and for some reason felt they needed to keep going. So they bought it and began paying attention to the stories in the neighborhood. Turns out there were a lot of moms with kids who were fleeing abusive relationships and needed a place to stay. So the church housed them for free and it grew from there. Funny thing is: ask the pastor or any of the leaders if they saw themselves doing anything remotely close to what they were doing and hear them say, "Absolutely not! We were confused the whole time!" I mean think about it: if we always knew what was ahead or what we were doing, *would we really have any need for God?* All we can do is open our sails and prepare for the ride. Because: good people, the Spirit's wind is blowing. Pentecost is now.

Conclusion: So now do you know what you call such holy confusion? You call it life within the Spirit-filled church. Always has been. Always will be. So we keep open our sails. We keep trying to catch the wind. And we continue to make gospel noise, wherever it is the wind blows.