

Beyond Babble

Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2010

Acts 2: 1-12; John 14: 15-27

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How many of you have seen the “J and K Wedding Entrance” video on U-Tube? U-Tube has, in a way, globalized our ability to share ourselves and experiences with the whole world. Any ordinary individual can make a video, homemade, uncut, imperfect, and post it on U-tube. If it receives lots of “hits” your story can become a world-wide sensation. Justin Beber, the young teen musical sensation started out on a simple u-tube video his mother posted.

Jill and Kevin’s wedding entrance became a wildly popular hit. A formal wedding is about to begin. The minister stands at the front and welcomes the congregation. The wedding party prepares for the procession, when suddenly, *like the rush of a mighty wind*, the sanctuary is filled with unexpected sound and rhythm and Chris Brown’s “*Forever*” causes the well tailored ushers to throw the wedding bulletins in the air and begin dancing to the beat up and down the aisle. Each bridesmaid and groomsman has choreographed their own processional, and the entire wedding party rocks and rolls up the aisle, doing handstands and well rehearsed gyrations. The groom himself, Kevin, bursts through the assembled procession with a forward roll and the congregation cheers. Finally, it’s time for the bride. And with a joyous smile Jill boogies her way up the aisle, her Kevin gliding to meet her and escorting her to the altar.

When you go home simply google “Jill and Kevin’s Big Day” and the homemade video will pop up if you haven’t already seen it.

What was astounding was how big this spirited new wedding processional became to the u-tube culture. Symbolic of some sort of aha realization that, indeed, even in the most serious of moments, a life commitment of holy matrimony, the spirit can be let loose, causing us to dance

and breathe and pulse with life. Now, that might not be everyone's cup of tea, but for the millions who have viewed this, it was rather revolutionary.

Not so different from that day of Pentecost, long ago when so many devout Jews had gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Shavuot, or Festival of Weeks. This was a harvest festival in late spring when the first fruits were presented to the Lord in thanksgiving for God's grace and mercy. Also called "Pentecost," this festival occurred fifty days after Passover, commemorating God's gift of the law on Mt. Sinai to the Hebrew people. It was a joyous festival and because the weather was generally great at that time of year, Jerusalem was packed with more than its usual fare of international pilgrims and faithful.

Included among the throngs were about 120 practicing, pious, Christ believing Jews – according to Luke, who had been instructed by Jesus prior to his ascension to wait with prayer and patience for the Holy Spirit.

In the midst of their daily prayers something crazy happened. Like "the rush of a mighty wind" those devout Jews and disciples who had been on their knees in prayer somehow got "the fever" and something new broke out among them. Imagine a room full of bagpipes all going at once. Evidently, there was so much noise that they drew a crowd. People from all over Jerusalem came running, curious to see what was happening. As they peered through the windows and pushed through the doors, they were surprised to hear someone speaking their own language so far from home. So many different languages at once - Parthians expected to see other Parthians. Libyans, other Libyans. Except what they saw were a gathering of noisy Galileans – to them, country folks. Instead of fancy clothes they were dressed in a version of first-century overalls and they were "going on and on about God's mighty acts like a bunch of Ph.D.'s in middle eastern languages" (*Barbara Brown Taylor, The Gospel of the Holy Spirit*).

Whether this was exactly the way it happened, we of course don't know. Maybe they were all dancing – certainly a universal language. Or laughing. Or hugging. Or crying. Though Luke clearly describes this as a mysterious linguistic event, perhaps the joy that they saw in their Pentecostal eyes was what helped them to hear and understand. I wish I could have been there!

In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor, "...before the day was over, the church had grown from 120 to more than 3,000." Not so unlike the conversion of so many from a u-tube video. "Shy people had become bold, scared people had become gutsy, and lost people had found a sure sense of direction. Disciples who had not believed themselves capable of tying their own sandals without Jesus discovered abilities within themselves they never knew they had. When they opened their mouths to speak, they sounded like Jesus. When they laid their hands upon the sick, it was as if Jesus himself had touched them. In short order, they were doing things they had never seen anyone but him do, and there was no explanation for it, except that they had dared to BREATHE on that day of Pentecost. They had sucked in God's own breath and they had been transformed by it." (*Taylor, Home by Another Way, p. 144*).

The question for me is whether we still believe in a God who acts like that. Do we still believe in a God who blows through closed doors and sets us on fire? Do we still believe in a God with power to transform us, both as individuals and a people, or have we come to an unspoken agreement that our God is "pretty old and tired by now, someone to whom we may address prayer requests but not anyone we really expect to change our lives?" (*Taylor 145*). Pentecost calls us to believe "more" rather than "less" about God and our ability to experience God's dramatic, as well as gentle, movements in our lives. Pentecost challenges us to become Progressive Pentecostals who expect great things from God and great things from ourselves.

There are many great, great teachings on the Holy Spirit ... her purpose and promise. It is helpful and engaging to expand ones knowledge and one's expectations. However, I hope that you won't rest until you have felt the Holy Spirit blow through your own life, rearranging things that don't work anymore, opening things up and maybe even setting your own heart on fire. There's not much you can do to make it happen, as far as I know, except to ask for such an experience yourself... praying "Come Holy Spirit" whenever you can. Don't be afraid. You can even do it in secret so no one knows! But if you don't want anything to change in your life, if you are satisfied with where you are, with what you are about, and with who you are becoming, then I would advise you against the "Come Holy Spirit" prayer. If, however, you are the kind of person who likes to stand out on the porch where there is a storm moving through so you can smell and feel the power that is pushing the trees around, then you are probably someone through whom the Holy Spirit might just make an appearance.

But this is only the first part of the process. Equally important is recognizing the Holy Spirit when it appears. I know so many people who lament that they have never encountered God in this way...but when they start talking about their lives it seems pretty obvious at least to me that they have. They just didn't know what to call it. Today, after this service, we are all going to have a chance to share a bit about our lives and just maybe in the process you will learn how to name the movement of the Holy in your own life.

But let me give you a few ways that I believe the Holy Spirit acts.

1. New Beginnings. You are feeling stuck. Let's say you've been in a bad mood for the last year. It seems you have just been running that treadmill, the same thing day in and out at work, at church, at home. Then one night you are laying in bed and you hear a bird singing and you ask yourself, "why is that bird singing in the middle of the night?" and

suddenly you realize it's not the middle of the night anymore but the sun is creeping over the horizon. The bird sings and something in your chest just kind of softens. You take a deep breath and for the first time in months and your chest just opens up. You get a second wind. I call this the Holy Spirit.

2. Another hallmark of the Holy Spirit is to give people a way back into a relationship. Maybe you are estranged from someone you really care about, or *have* cared about... and suddenly you just get tired of being estranged and so you start thinking of ways you can get through it. You write in your journal or draft a letter or talk with a friend. But the hurt is still just aching in there, hanging and suddenly an opportunity appears and for not logical reason you just say "do it" and you go on over or take out your cell phone and the other person is home and the rest, well, is history. Your heart opens and the right words come out and things change. I call that an act of the Holy Spirit.
3. There are so many ways. You find yourself speaking with an eloquence you didn't know you had. You offer forgiveness you didn't intend to offer. You listen and hear instead of talk and impose. You find yourself taking risks you didn't think you had the courage to take. A grief, long held, suddenly frees itself and you don't feel guilty for feeling so good.

What a great day this is for breathing. God's moment by moment gift to us. It/she (yes, the word for Spirit in the Bible is feminine) counts on us to lend her our lives and in return a promise is given...giving us language to speak of things we cannot begin to understand.

I saw a bumper sticker that said, "expect a miracle." Then I saw another that said, "accept a miracle." Both invite us to embrace a world in which transformation can occur at any moment and in any context. In the gospel passage, Jesus makes astounding affirmations about his

disciples, and presumably ourselves today - God will give us an Advocate, the Spirit, who will inspire and empower us to do “greater works than I [Jesus] do.” Come, Holy Spirit, Come.

Amen.