

Acts 2:1-21
June 9, 2019 Pentecost
An astonishing thing happened
Roy W. Howard

When the wind blows through the house, you duck for cover. When a tornado comes through, you hide in the bathtub. I've always thought that's a scary plan. When I heard it as a child I imagined people flying around in bathtubs. Harry Potter, for real! Now I shudder at the destruction. I grew up on the coast of Florida where hurricanes can be and usually always devastating.

On the other hand, when the mighty winds blow through the house of the people of God, they have already run for cover, hiding in fear and trembling, not in bathtubs, but alone in an upper room. They don't have a clue about the future or what to do with their lives. All they know is the life they knew was put to death with Jesus. The future coming-to-be with Jesus' resurrection was unimaginable. Fearful, clueless and anxious about the future, they do the next right thing: follow Jesus instructions: **wait and pray. Wait and listen for God's next move.**

That's worth remembering: when fearful about the future, do the next right thing: follow Jesus' instructions.

But let's be honest. Their fears did not go away as they waited for a future they couldn't imagine, nor did they create strategic plans to calm their anxiety. Instead, they lived honestly before God with all the broken pieces of themselves, waiting patiently and praying, listening for God's future.

The days of Pollyanna didn't arrive, but the Spirit of God **did** and blew open the house of fear. Their fears turned to hope and their anxiety turned to courage. These once timid disciples took the message of Jesus to the streets, mixing it up with folks from all over the world.

What do you make of this?

Pentecost was one day, but the Spirit is always moving among us renewing the face of the earth.

I believe when the Holy Spirit blows through the people of God, a fearful people is transformed into a courageous, joyful community proclaiming God's Good News to **all** people in **all** places. I think the Spirit is continually blowing through the people of God even here at Saint Mark.

That means we have to be always looking and listening and keeping our hearts open to what God is doing now.

Can I get an Amen?

There are massive changes occurring in the world. Nothing is as it was ten years ago, let alone a generation ago. For instance,

For instance, the most recent data in Montgomery County shows that 41% of residents over the age of five speak a language other than English at home. (In 2000, that number was 32%). Over 30% of residents were born in another country and that number is growing each year. Our country is undergoing a sea change in religious and cultural identities in the mass movement of migrants around the world. That change will only accelerate, along with multiple faith traditions in the public square once dominated by Christians.

Ever since the day of Pentecost, congregations have been and will continue to be affected by broad changes. **Christians of all traditions and cultural backgrounds now live in a multi-religious, multi-cultural society.** New forces are emerging everywhere while religious institutions are no longer as bearers of truth much less healing. As a result an increasing number of people, particularly among the millennial generation are without any spiritual community. They consider themselves Seekers – and identify as non-affiliated. They longing for a fresh vitality in spirituality and worship with a passion in social activism that is rooted in a community of faith. **These changes are accelerating and show no signs of slowing down.**

The dial up world is never coming back. Neither is coal, nor the Beatles.

Yet there are always counter forces of fear and anxiety pushing against change especially when their interests are threatened. Such counter forces existed on the day of Pentecost and they exist today. This is the great peril of the wide spread resurgence of white supremacy and nationalism that thrives on fear of the stranger, particularly the non-white stranger.

Yet, the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ always counter these forces, as they did on the day of Pentecost.

The gospel of Jesus, the one Peter proclaimed and that we proclaim today, welcomes the outsiders, the lost and the lonely, the broken-hearted and those seeking a community where they belong in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Amen?

On the day of Pentecost, barriers were blown away as the miracle of a new community was born of the Holy Spirit. The only ones who were afraid were those who insisted upon clinging to the old divisions of race, class and religion. In Jesus Christ, these divisions are dismantled. Any attempt to put them back is an affront to God.

This time of change is opportunity for spiritual renewal at the center our congregation's ministry if we are courageous enough to step into the future with openhearted faith in the living God. The great mark of our congregation is a welcoming spirit of hospitality extended to all people with regard for the barriers that so often divide people: gender, age, race and nationality, sexual orientation or social status.

The joyful challenge before Saint Mark today is the same as yesterday: discovering fresh ways to embody God's love among the people, in surrounding neighborhoods, across every barrier, trusting the Holy Spirit to transform lives.

Remember: the early Church did not begin as an institution whose survival its members were enlisted to ensure. The Church born at Pentecost is a movement of believers, whose lives are being transformed by the Holy Spirit and summoned into the streets to announce the Good News of God's love. The Church began a movement, when believers heard the Good News of God's love, opened themselves to the transforming grace of the Spirit and went forth into the world speaking truth to power, welcoming the lost, embracing the outcast and joyfully following Jesus. I often wonder if the birth of the institution was the death of the church. The primary purpose of any church is lives transformed by the Spirit.

Get this: the surrounding culture responded to this movement and its message with "astonishment." More importantly, day-by-day, God added to their number those who were being made whole (saved.)

This remains the calling of Saint Mark - to be a community of Christ where people are made whole - saved - by God's Spirit, capable loving God and loving neighbor. We have no other calling.

Can I get an Amen? Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

