“Swept out the door”

Acts 2:1:21

May 20, 2018

I am sure that many of us have been in a college graduation. It is quite the event. For me and one year later, Sara, Gustavus Adolphus College graduation is a week long affair. They have this thing called Senior week where when you are finished with your finals on that Saturday, you have an entire week of hanging out and partying. Let me tell you, it is a great week. One last chance to hang with your friends before you have to go off to whatever job you need to start that summer. So many of my friends had jobs lined up. A lot of them were going to work for a bank, some would start teaching. For myself I had no real plans. I was going to move back home with my parents and figure it out. But at that moment I was just enjoying senior week. We got to that Sunday afternoon and it was time for graduation. The 600 some of us gathered in the gym and lined up to get ready to head over to the football field. We then did all the pomp and circumstance, listened to a couple of speeches, one that was waaaaayyyyy too long. Then the names of the students began to get called. Thankfully I am a Geurink, so I went relatively early and the reader did not butcher my name. I walked across the stage and got my diploma. Then I walked through this giant line of all the professors of the school. Shook hands and gave hugs to the ones I had in class and even some I didn’t. The ceremony ended and then more pictures were taken. We all went back to my house and had a graduation party. It was a great time. A group of us guys stayed another couple of days. We just told stories and reminisced about our college glory days. One night we were just sitting around the bar at our favorite haunt, Patricks. Conversation got going and I said, “I think we all need to go home now.” We were just trying to delay the inevitable. Our time as college students was over. Time to move on. We couldn’t turn back time no matter what we did.

Turning back time seems like something the disciples would have wanted. They were trying to figure out what happens next. Jesus is now gone again. They were hanging out in Jerusalem, they had to replace a disciple, since Judas had betrayed them. They settled on Mathias. Then the spring festival comes. It’s Pentecost time. This was the celebration, fifty days after Passover of the spring harvest. In Jewish tradition the law was given on this day during the festival. The disciples were all gathered in one place. In some sort of house. It doesn’t say what kind of house this was. Maybe they were on the back porch. Because all of a sudden, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and filled the entire house. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability. Then we are told about Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And they hear this sound, they gathered around. So if all the disciples were in a house I wondered how it worked. Perhaps it was if the Holy Spirit had swept the disciples right out of the house. The crowd all heard the disciples speaking in their own native language. From all sorts of countries all over the world. All of them were amazed and perplexed. What does this mean? Some were skeptical and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Peter hearing the questions and skepticism of the crowd got up and started preaching. Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem let this be know to you and listen to what I say. Indeed these people are not drunk it is only nine o clock in the morning. This has always been one of my favorite bible verses. To counter the claims of the disciples being drunk, he just says that it is only nine am. Maybe the disciples had a rager the night before. Give some better evidence Peter! Anyway, we will assume that Peter and the disciples are being truthful. Peter continues on with some words from the prophet Joel. Most of the prophets in the Bible near Joel were rather negative. They had some bad things to say about festivals and worship. But not Joel. He was positive. Peter continues, “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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. There ends our Pentecost passage for today.

Pentecost is a funny church holiday. It doesn’t get the same pomp and circumstance that Christmas and Easter get. Christmas, Christ is born, God has chosen to live among us. Wonderful. Easter, Christ is risen, the power of death is defeated. Wonderful. What about Pentecost? We think of it as the birth of the church. But this birth calls us to do something. It can feel like a graduation ceremony. Like it is all over, whatever we have been working towards. But like a graduation it calls us to something more. To use what we have learned to create something more. These disciples have learned so much and have “graduated” from Jesus’ academy of discipleship. Perhaps the crowd gathered there is the next group of disciples. God has broken in with the Holy Spirit to bring about Jesus’ message to the rest of the world. That this is the Holy fire with which the church is to begin.

Pentecost calls us to a lot. It is the ultimate equalizing experience. Some have interpreted this passage as the opposite of the tower of Babel. With the tower of Babel all of the people had become the same. They were much to alike. So God decided to shake things up. To confuse the people with not allowing them to understand each other. And the groups of people dispersed. At Pentecost, the disciples were able to speak in different languages. But that is not the miracle here. The miracle is that everyone was able to hear in their own language. Everyone. Even groups that wouldn’t dare be with each other. The Egyptians want nothing to do with Judeans and vise versa. They can’t communicate with each other. That stops here, they are able to communicate with each other here. This is a call of Christian life that accounts for our differences and does not push them off to the side. There is a place for all of us in this Pentecost story.

One of the most wonderful things about church is that we get to associate with people of different ages. Outside of our families this is one of the few places in society we get to do this. The little kids that we have here can run around and sit on the laps of their elders. Our young parents can listen for wisdom among our elders. Our elders can learn a few things from us millennials to. It is a wonderful thing to watch in action. Our young men and women shall see visions. Our old men and women shall dream dreams. I think of Jean Ray today. It is really hard to be upbeat and preach a fun and energetic Pentecost sermon today. We have all lost a good friend and servant in Jean. She must have had many great dreams for this church. For how we can serve our community. For how we can help those in need. For how we can worship God and study the scriptures. In just two hours from now, we will be celebrating her life. How she took this call to discipleship and spreading this power of the Holy Spirit.

How may we take this call seriously? How can this be more than a birthday celebration of the church or a graduation ceremony? Willie Jennings is a seminary professor and he gave a lecture recently. He said this, “Too many pastors have become the high priests of segregation.” He goes on, too many of us have settled for the love of their own people rather than trying to create a new people.” Celebrating Pentecost as just a birthday is settling on our love for our own people. We need to recognize that Pentecost was a beginning, it was a revolution. It is not just a day, it is a whole season of our church year. A season that breaks down barriers. That attempts to learn other languages and ways of being. Jennings was asked how we might move away from being high priests of segregation. He replied, “Think very carefully about your loves…make sure your life gives witness to a wider love.” Pentecost gives us the ability to imagine a wider love.

The disciples could have just stayed in their own little house and attend to their own needs. But the Holy Spirit swept them out. To proclaim to everyone. Everyone heard that spirit in their own language. This is a radically inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ. How can we reach out and touch those who are different from us? Not just find more young people. Not just find more people like us. To embrace the call for us to be changed as well. That is the power of Pentecost.

What would it look like for the Holy Spirit to sweep us right out of here? For what purpose? What would we do? I am not sure. We need to be open to the movement of the Spirit. The one that nudges us along. The one that even proves us wrong. That might be the hardest part. Has the Holy Spirit proven you wrong? Could you admit it if she has?

Friends, Pentecost is a beginning. Not like at Graduation when I kept looking back. Wondering if things would ever be like that again. This is a call to the future. To looking ahead. Our church may not be what it was like in the “glory days”. But can we be the church for this time and this place. Can we call upon the name of the Lord? Can we be open to the Holy Spirit working in our midst? Can we be swept right out the door? A new thing is happening. Let’s ride that Holy Wind. Let us say “I think we need to go out these doors now.” Amen.

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All 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. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.7Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ 13But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

**Peter Addresses the Crowd**

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. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:   
17 “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.   
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
   in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
     and they shall prophesy.   
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
   and signs on the earth below,  
     blood, and fire, and smoky mist.   
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
   and the moon to blood,  
     before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.   
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”