

Let It Go, Let It Be, Let It Come: The Spirit Moves
Pentecost Sunday
Acts 2:1-13

Come, Holy Spirit. Come as mighty wind or gentle breath. Blow on the embers of our faith. Let us know how it felt to be there that day, to be touched by your presence as if by fire...

Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day's mentor, used to say, "When you don't know what to do, keep going to meetings." It's good advice, because when we're all together—even for a meeting (or a church service) that we go to only because we said we would—sometimes important things happen. Life-changing things. Things that just might turn the world upside down.

That's what happened on that first Pentecost day.

For a little while after Jesus' death, he would show up. From time to time the disciples would be together someplace—still working on this start-up they knew they were supposed to keep working on in some way—and suddenly it would strangely feel like their founder--Jesus--was there with them. He showed up in different ways and at some pretty random times: he walked through the closed doors of locked rooms, he went for long walks, he appeared on beaches at dawn, waving fishing advice. Sometimes he came hungry; sometimes he cooked meals for his friends. It was like he had one more thing he wanted to say to them before he left, and he could only do it in person.

Finally, he said it. "**Go,**" he said. Go make other disciples. Go and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life."(*The Message*) He seemed to be saying, I want you to get out of this familiar place. All that you've learned from me? It's not just for you. It's for everybody. Your work is to make sure that everybody knows what I've told you.

And then he was gone. Really gone, this time.

We are still not always clear about what Jesus meant when he said those last words—"Go make disciples." We still wonder what they mean, and whether Jesus was actually talking to *us*. Was he telling us to feed and heal people? Or did he mean we were supposed to *actually talk* to other people—outside the church—about Jesus?

Those twelve disciples who were there to hear the words come out of Jesus' mouth were at least as confused as we are. "I still don't get it," I imagine some of them said. "What are we supposed to say?" "I've never been very good at that sort of thing." "That is really expecting too much," one of them probably said, with an edge of anger in his voice, because anger is what we do when we are afraid.

And they were still talking this way when they scheduled their next meeting on Pentecost—which they did because they were all going to be in town anyway, for the Jewish holiday.

So that Pentecost morning, they were in one of their regular meetings. Maybe they were reminiscing about the good days they'd had together, the best times—which were now pretty clearly over. Maybe they were parsing some of Jesus' words, trying to make them seem more normal, less unsettling.

And then, suddenly, something happened. They all felt it, but they didn't have words for it; they could only describe it later with vivid words like "wind" and "fire". Those skeptical, un-confident, hesitant disciples, even the ones who said, "I wouldn't know where to start telling somebody else about Jesus,"...now suddenly they had words. They had words that came from *inside of them*, instead of words they copied from someone else. And suddenly, unexpectedly, they felt like they *got* it now, what it was they had to do, where they were supposed to go, who they were supposed to talk to. *Now they got it*. Not by studying or researching more, but paying attention to some unexplainable-but-sure thing that happened inside their hearts.

All of a sudden there was something there, something that poured out of them. Lots of people talked at the same time, with different words. There was laughter. People were crying--some with joy, and some out of the depth of their grief. Honesty. Authentic emotions that had been kept inside for a long time. People watching them said, "They must be drunk or something!" But they weren't. That's just how the Holy Spirit of God tends to look when it is fully unleashed: its bubbles shoot up to the top—not like the gentle fizz inside a can of diet soda, more like a bottle of champagne that has been shaken hard. They were filled with the Spirit of God—a spirit that we rarely set free, because it tends to gush out and make a mess of orderly spaces and violate the rules about proper behavior.

This is the Spirit that launched the Church that first Pentecost. If we take this story seriously--if we really think of that day as setting the tone for the church Jesus intended to leave behind—I think we probably have to believe that the Spirit longs to crash right through the walls of beautiful buildings like this one. She probably squirms through orderly 60-minute worship services, chafes at the line between who's a member and who is not. The writer Annie Dillard once said, "It is madness to wear [straw and velvet] hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. [If we are worshiping the God whose Spirit appeared at Pentecost] Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews..."

So what happened between then and now? Now we have walls on our churches. Certain places where we expect God to show up, at appointed times, and in predictable ways. But those boundaries are ours, not God's. The truth is, the light that is inside this space is bigger than the space itself. The hearts and hands *and voices* that get nurtured and formed here—*your heart, your hands, your voice*—have big, important, messy work to do outside this space.

A few weeks ago I read a simple sentence—a slogan really—that has been working on me, changing my thinking, ever since. Here it is: *God loves adverbs*. What if that's right? What if what matters to God is less *what* we do than how we do it? What if the point of all we do in the church is to change the *ways* we do all the things we already do out in the world?

Talk kindly.
Work courageously.
Drive peacefully.
Wait patiently.
Give extravagantly.
Love generously.

What if God's house is not the church, but the whole world? What if the church is not what happens on Sunday, but what we do Monday through Saturday? What if what we really do here, on Sunday, is to celebrate all the ways we have been Church on the other days, in other places, in our relationships with all those people who are not inside this sanctuary with us?

We have put altars in the places where God has appeared before, to remind us to look there. Those people who were there on that first Pentecost, who suddenly seemed drunk with joy, and were able to speak in languages that they had never known before, and to tell other people who Jesus was in ways they had never had words for before...they also had grown up in an orderly religion, just like we have. They too were used to an altar at the front of the sanctuary, where teeny tiny fires burned on gentle candles, in a controlled way, in a confined space.

What shifted for them on that Pentecost day, and what made them the founders of the fastest growing movement for good in the history of the world, was that suddenly they knew that the altars on which God appears aren't confined to one spot where we are looking for the holy, or the spaces we think of as church. Those altars are in *all* the places we live. Maybe those altars are even *inside* of us. Maybe the fire that burns on them is the fire we carry into our business deals and our classrooms and our love affairs, our dinner table conversations, the way we make eye contact with strangers on the street. Maybe that fire that burns inside of us *is* what Jesus was telling us to go and pass on to everyone we meet. Maybe that fire—the kind of fire that brings life and joy and the presence of something holy everywhere it goes--looks something like this:

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlKdbWwruY>

Howard Thurman said once, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive." For God, for the church, *for the world*, may we too come alive on this Pentecost day.