

WESTMINSTER
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Get Out There

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Invocation

Eternal God,

In the reading of the Scripture, may your Word be heard;

In the meditations of our hearts, may your Word be known;

And in the faithfulness of our lives, may your Word be shown.

AMEN.

Scripture Reading

New Revised Standard Version: Updated Edition — Acts 2:1-21

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

Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because

each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: '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."

Trail Magic

One of my favorite humans on the planet is a guy by the name of Ryan Van Duzer. I mean the name all by itself is just too good. Ryan is a bike packer, which means he's one of those wonderfully crazy people who load up all their camping gear on their bikes and take off on wild adventures. Who would ever do such a thing? I've actually had the chance to meet and ride with Ryan a few times, and he is one of the most genuine and lovely people I know.

One of Ryan's favorite topics is what he calls "Trail Magic." Sometimes trail magic is when you are completely out of supplies, and then you come around a bend and there just happens to be a couple set up on the side of the road giving

away free water. Sometimes trail magic is when you crest a hill and behold an absolutely gorgeous vista you weren't expecting. And one time, trail magic was Ryan meeting a fellow bike packer — traveling the world with his dog riding along on the back of his bike. Seriously, look up Mira the Dog Packer on YouTube when you get home. It's just incredible.

But Ryan's tagline — the catchphrase for his whole YouTube channel — is "Get out there!" Because never once have I ever come across trail magic while sitting on the couch.

I've been wondering all week: what does trail magic have to do with the Holy Spirit? Let's take a look at the text and find out.

All Together in One Place — Hiding

The text opens with a deceptively quiet line: "they were all together in one place." That sounds harmless enough — maybe even cozy. But we have to remember what brought these disciples to be huddled together behind closed doors in the first place.

Jesus had been tried in a kangaroo court. He had been convicted and sentenced to death. He was hung on a cross. And then he rose from the dead. And while that resurrection was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to these

disciples, it did not for one second change how the Jewish authorities felt about them. These were still wanted men.

John's Gospel makes it plain. On the night of the resurrection: "the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them." (John 20:19). A week later, the same: "Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them." (John 20:26). So when Acts begins with "they were all together in one place," what it really means is they were hiding. Behind locked doors. Away from the world.

And then — the Spirit shows up.

Double Meaning — Tongues

There's some beautiful wordplay going on in how the Spirit arrives, and it's worth slowing down to catch it.

Fire — Passion

This is the reason we wear red on Pentecost Sunday. The tongues of fire carry the impression of passion — intensity, freedom, heat. Someone in our staff Bible study this week made the point that Pentecost is basically the one Sunday a year that Presbyterians can dance and clap in worship without

feeling guilty about it. So you know, feel free to let loose the rest of the service. It's ok!

But beyond the spectacle, look at what this fiery passion actually does. It pushes the disciples outside the doors. It makes them leave the comfort and safety of their upper room. It makes them get out there. Those tongues of fire are doing some impressive work. But that's not the only kind of tongue in this passage.

Languages – Unifying

Here's where the double meaning gets really wild. The tongues of fire push these disciples out the door, and once they're out there, they are given the gift of speaking in the native tongues of every person around them. Jerusalem at Pentecost would have been an incredible hodgepodge of cultures and languages and traditions – devout pilgrims from all over the known world, all gathered in one place.

The best way I can imagine the reaction: picture riding the subway in New York City, and someone gets on the train and is somehow able to speak simultaneously to every single person on the car, in their own language. We would all go absolutely crazy. What is going on here?

We know what's going on here: the Spirit wants the Gospel preached, and the Spirit is going to work through these disciples to make sure every language and culture represented in that crowd is able to hear it. The Spirit is changing the disciples so that they can adapt what they know – and meet the culture around them where it actually is. Some in the crowd, not knowing what else to make of it, land on another explanation: these guys must be drunk.

It's 5:00 Somewhere!

I've mentioned before that Peter is my favorite. Even here, right after the arrival of the Spirit, he's still got that rebellious streak. In response to the skeptics he says: "Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning." (Acts 2:15)

Which means – "We're not drunk yet! That comes later!" I love that.

On one level it just points to the fact that these disciples are perfectly fine having a party, which is something we can take to heart ourselves. But more importantly, Peter's quip opens a window onto something deeper.

Sometimes the Spirit Is Unpredictable

We like to think we can control every aspect of our lives, including our spiritual ones. We can build an Excel spreadsheet for how we are going to develop our faith. We can draw up a five-point plan for spiritual growth. We can put together a neat and tidy PR proposal for reaching the masses. But sometimes — and I say this with great affection — the Spirit is unpredictable. Sometimes when she really gets a hold of us, things can get so alive and unexpected and exuberant that people might wonder if we've gotten into the wine at nine in the morning.

The point is that sometimes the Spirit leads us to uncomfortable places. Sometimes she leads us into crazy circumstances we never would have planned. And sometimes — maybe most of the time — the Spirit wants us to leave the comfort of our upper rooms and get out there.

After this remarkable scene, Peter launches into the very first sermon the Church has ever heard. He starts by quoting the prophet Joel, making the case that all of these extraordinary things unfolding in Jerusalem are not future prophecy — they're happening right now, right here, among the people

standing in front of him. And then he wraps up with one of the great lines in all of Scripture:

“Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:21)

That word saved is worth sitting with. It is the Greek word *sozo*, and it carries a much richer cargo than we usually give it credit for. *Sozo* means: to be made well. To be restored. To be brought into right relationship.

A few years ago I had my own experience of trail magic. Some friends and I were on a mission trip in Vietnam, spending long days traveling to meet Christians and share experiences of faith. By the end of one particularly exhausting stretch we were cooked – completely spent. Our trip leader knew it, and took us for an evening to a coffee shop owned by a Christian couple. The shop was called *Sozo*. The magic wasn't lost on me. In that room, with a comfortable couch and an incredible espresso, I was made well. I was restored. Our previously cranky team was brought back into right relationship with one another. It was its own little mini-salvation.

Which means salvation is bigger than we usually let it be. Peter isn't just talking about what happens when we die. He's talking about wholeness for all manner of things that can

break us. He's talking about restoration — being brought back to who we were meant to be. He's talking about right relationship with our God and with our fellow human beings. And here's the radical part: Peter says it's for everyone. Not for some. Not for the worthy. Not for the people who have their act together. Everyone. There is no one outside the bounds of Christ's saving work. There is no one unworthy of being made well, no one unworthy of being restored, no one unworthy of being brought into a community of love. That door is open to all, no exceptions.

What Can We Do With All of This?

1. Get Out There

There is a model of church growth that I think a lot of us know by heart, tell me if this sounds familiar: we will hold excellent programs, we will host wonderful events, we will do incredible things in our building, and we will hope that everyone will come to us. And honestly? On some level that's a real and reasonable strategy. We have some of the best programs around, and more of them than I can keep up with — I've been

trying to get to all of them since I arrived, and I'm woefully behind. Many people have come in from the community and been genuinely blessed by this place.

But it's not enough.

Looking at this text, it seems clear that the Spirit has never been much interested in staying put. She wants to run free. She wants to push people out of their upper rooms. She wants people to get out there.

So instead of always waiting for the world to come to us, I think the Spirit is laying a call on this congregation right now to go. Let's go see what the world has to offer. Let's go with a posture of curiosity, ready to be surprised by what we discover. Let's go on the hunt — not so much for trail magic, but for Spirit Magic. Let's go meet someone whose story knocks us out. Let's go find people who are working to bring salvation to the world in all the multitude of ways that looks like. Let's go be a presence in our community, speaking the language of the Spirit as we move.

2. Speak the Language of the Culture Around Us

One of the things I love most about this Pentecost text is what it does not do. It does not invite the culture to change. The disciples don't go out and preach in their own language and simply hope that everyone around them eventually picks up on it. In the power of the Spirit, the disciples adapt what they know and understand, and they speak directly into the culture around them. The Spirit gives them the power to meet people where they are, so that others can be made to belong.

Perhaps the Spirit is offering us that same invitation. Now, I recognize that in the span of one sermon I have suggested we allow ourselves freedom to dance, let go of some of our beloved spreadsheets, and now I'm suggesting that change might be an option. Hang with me, Presbyterians – we'll get through it together. There are oxygen tanks available in the back following the service...

But what if that's exactly what's on offer here? What if there is someone in our community we could serve more fully if we were willing to adapt some of what we do? What if there is someone desperate for a taste of salvation who just needs us to speak their language? And what if the Spirit is already

giving us the tools to do exactly that — just as she did for those disciples on the first Pentecost?

3. Let's Tell the Stories

At the beginning of this series was a story that — I'm not sure what you'd call the opposite of trail magic — a story of a bike trip where just about everything went wrong. Ryan and I were talking once over lunch about how no one ever tells the story of the ride where everything went perfectly and they made it to the destination without incident. No, the stories everyone tells are the ones with the complete disaster, the total calamity, and the trail magic that comes out of nowhere to save you.

I wonder what stories are out there waiting for us. Stories of the Spirit working in the lives of people we haven't met yet. Stories of our brothers and sisters in this community finding salvation — and just dying to tell somebody about it. Stories of abject failure and disaster brought to redemption by something greater than themselves.

And I wonder what would happen if we started telling those stories ourselves. Maybe we don't all need to start a YouTube channel like Ryan. But we can tell each other. We can practice

telling the stories of where the Spirit has moved. We can practice telling the salvation work of Christ. We can practice sharing our own encounters with God. We can start passing along all the Spirit Magic we find when we get out there.

And so friends...may you, on this Pentecost Sunday, have a renewed encounter with the Spirit of God. May she push you to leave behind the comfort of your upper room, and to get out there. May you come to see that there are stories of salvation unfolding all around us, because this salvation in Christ is available to everyone — no exceptions. And may you come back to us ready to tell the story of where God has led you, and the magic and wonder you have seen in the world.

Amen.



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