



June 9, 2019

The Spirit Enlivens the Church  
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Acts 2:1-8, 12-18 NRSV

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

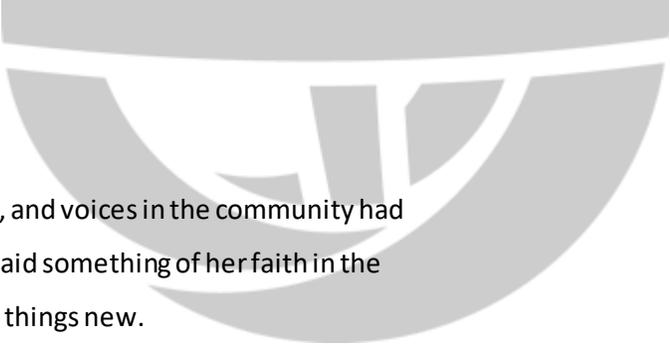
<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

<sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

The other day I was walking through St. Mary's and I saw a quote on the wall of the new waiting room on the main floor of the Alfred building from Sister Generose. It said, "***We must not be content only to see things as they are. We must have the vision to see what things can and must become.***"

I imagine she was speaking of health care and the changes that were happening during her time as hospital administrator in the 1980s. It was a time of great change and deepening partnership with



Mayo Clinic. I'm sure that some of the sisters, plenty of the staff, and voices in the community had some reservations about these changes. But I also imagine this said something of her faith in the Spirit of God who is not stagnant, but ever on the move to make things new.

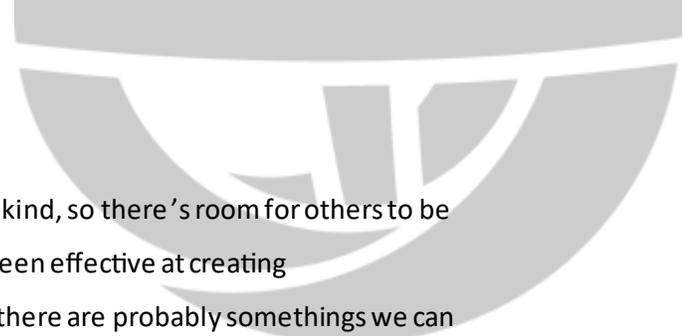
Pentecost is a season that calls us to action, to “not be content only to see things as they are” but to “have a vision for what things can become.” Now I realize that most people don't like change all that much. And a few of us thrive on mixing it up every once in a while. And I really love when we, the church, get caught up in new things God is doing among us. I love that God disrupts the expected rhythms to give us a fresh breath of faith that calls us to lean into the future with anticipation and hope. I love that the Spirit empowers all people, men and women, young and old, slave and free to see visions and dream dreams of how God is at work to make things new. It reminds us that God is continually forming the world in grace and love; that God is continually seeking to work through us to bring justice and peace to a world that desperately needs it. The Spirit enlivens the church to see that the world does not have to remain only as we see it, but through the Spirit we can be part of shaping a more whole and healed world.

We are living in a time of disturbing distrust. Distrust of organizations, institutions, scientific research, national intelligence, and a general suspicion of those who may differ from us in anyway. It's taking its toll on our mental, social, and spiritual well-being. How have we gotten to a point where people are so afraid of what they do not know that they will not trust those who do?

Perhaps it is time for us to look for ways the Holy Spirit is breathing in us to see new visions of how the world moves forward together. We don't always look to the future with hope. We see the church getting older, we hear the stats that younger generations aren't participating as they once did; and we worry what the future will hold. But if we look more broadly, we might just see the Spirit doing her work to expand the table of grace and we may see some things we can learn along the way.

Last week in the Post-Bulletin, there was a front-page article about a new satellite of the Twin Cities based Eagle Brook Church coming to Rochester. Their plan is to start worshipping at the Civic Center in the fall. If you're not familiar with Eagle Brook, it is an evangelical non-denominational church that has 24,000 weekly worshipers at eight locations, and hundreds more watch online each week. Several people asked me this week what I thought. My first thought is there are over 60,000 people





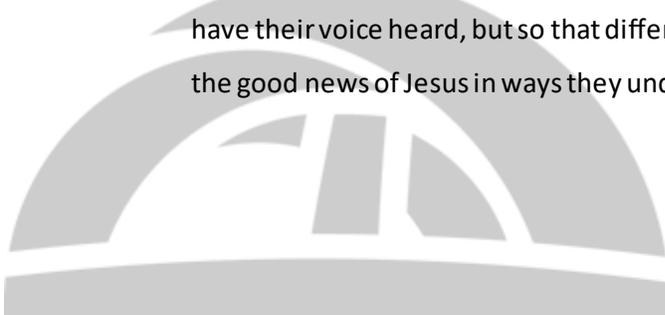
in Rochester that do not affiliate with a faith community of any kind, so there's room for others to be sharing the gospel. Another thought is that if Eagle Brook has been effective at creating environments which new people will become part of a church, there are probably some things we can learn about receiving new people, creating spaces that make people feel welcome, and being clear about who we believe God to be without compromising our theology and the central message of Jesus' love and forgiveness for all people.

There are probably some ways that the Spirit is moving in that community that, if we are open to it, the Spirit can move in and among us as well. There are also ways in which we have been open to the Spirit's movement that many evangelical churches have not, like women in ministry, the affirmation of God's love and acceptance of LGBT people, and the ways our church seeks to work across denominational and theological lines for the sake of serving our neighbors.

We need the Spirit to intercede to call us to seek the common good, rather than good for a particular group of people. Even if we are that particular group of people. We don't always make room at the table for new voices in leadership in our networks or in public spaces. We don't always anticipate that God will work through people we haven't looked to before to have wisdom or perspective that could benefit the communities to which we belong.

But lately, remarkable stirrings of the Spirit have been brewing. There have been new voices of leadership emerging in our denomination, the ELCA. For the first several years that I was a pastor, it was almost a guarantee anywhere in the country that if you were a candidate for bishop and you were tall, white, male, straight, and had a balding or graying head you were automatically the front runner. In the last three years, 6 bishops under 45 have been elected, and in the last ten years the number of female bishops has increased from 3 to 21 – which is almost 1/3 of all bishops in our church.

But even as leadership in some areas of the church are breathing new life, there is always more work to do. As we look at the future of our congregation, we need to seek out and make room for new voices and perspectives to provide new visions and dream new dreams, not so that other people can have their voice heard, but so that different parts of the church and the wider community can hear the good news of Jesus in ways they understand as well as those of us who have been following Jesus





for a long time. And we need new voice to rise from among us and trust that the Spirit of God is working in them.

I love the Spirit, but she presses us to go beyond our comfort zones, to step forward in faith, even when we're sure others may have more experience or "better" answers. She challenges us to be on the lookout for God for ways that we have not yet experienced God to act.

Trusting the Spirit becomes a daily spiritual exercise of prayer and openness to new things for all of us. It's not uncommon to feel some fear, frustration, anger, or confusion in the midst of what is unknown. Those early followers of Jesus felt some of the same things as they encountered rapid change and an uncertain future. But like those disciples, I hope you have some sense that the world's greatest days are yet ahead of us; that there is hope for future generations despite the mounting challenges our world faces. The Spirit is alive and moving among us. In Isaiah 43, God give this wisdom to his people who are in exile, "Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

What if we looked at all the things happening in our lives that seem beyond our control - those desert and wasteland places - and turned to wonder about how the Spirit might be working in and through those events? What if instead of jumping to conclusions or quickly retreating to what is familiar, we opened ourselves to dreaming with God, or even started with listening with openness to the visions others might have for the future. This openness to the Spirit's movement might just tamp down our fears and enable us to see possibilities that God will form a more beautiful, hopeful world.

God is doing something new. Like a deep breath we did not know we needed, the Spirit comes with grace and power to show us that the Spirit is someone we can trust. Trusting that the Spirit is at work can help us forge a new path forward through the challenges and roadblocks in life.

My friends, may the Spirit of the living God fill the empty places of your lives with grace and love, and may the Spirit fill you in such a way that you are not content only to see things as they are; but that you see what things can and must become. Amen.

