

May 23, 2021



All Sorts of People Speaking for God

Preacher: Jen Gruendler

Acts 2:1-21 NRSV

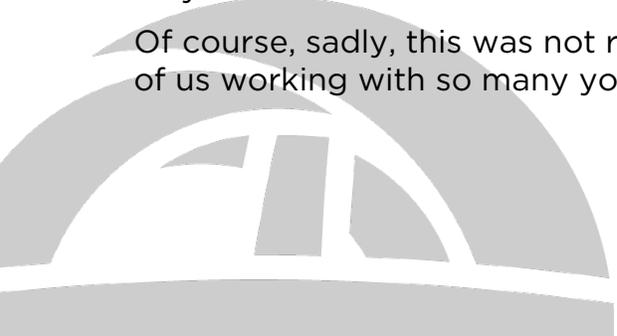
¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

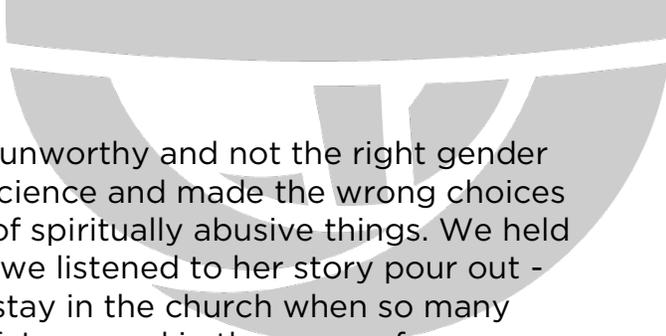
⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is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

¹⁴But 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:

One afternoon several years ago I found myself sitting in a small closed room with a few other ministry colleagues and a 20-something woman—we had been invited by her friend to share a bit of our stories and to create some brave space for her to share a bit of hers—she was weeping unconsolably as she looked at us and said—how can you? We asked her to say more...she whispered under her breath how can you stay in The Church?

Of course, sadly, this was not really an unusual question asked (especially for those of us working with so many young people) This woman had been deeply personally





harmful by a church-she had been told she was unworthy and not the right gender and believed the wrong things about God and science and made the wrong choices and that her call was unworthy and other sorts of spiritually abusive things. We held the space for her as she wrestled and wept and we listened to her story pour out - and she again asked how can you still love and stay in the church when so many others speak such horrible things in the name of Jesus and in the name of Christianity.

We sat with her, wiped her tears with boxes of Kleenex, and shared some of the whys for us. What kept us coming and hoping and loving the Church. We didn't sugar coat. We didn't hold back our own experiences of pain. But we also, this room of imperfect long-time Jesus followers were brought to tears as we shared about our love for the broken messy Church.

In total confession y'all there are times I still get haunted by that question-why stay? When I see the name of God and Jesus and The Church used in such horrible ways, I find myself wanting to yell out- "I swear I am not one of those kinds of Christians." I find myself repeatedly repenting historical (and some not so historical) stances of the church, choices of the church, very foundations of the institution of the church-that has absolutely caused harm to so many. In the name of Jesus and with the endorsements of churches- violence and harm has been done. The Church has sinned and been part of sin-full systems. Hard Stop.

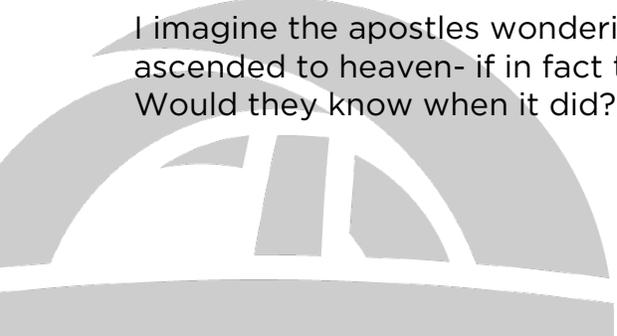
And yet, right? There is the "and, yet"....there has been so much good too? The Church has stepped in to care for people dying of diseases like AIDS, and built hospitals, homes, and schools around the world. It goes daily into neighborhoods and communities and villages and prisons to feed and clothe and love and care for God's children-communities others have forgotten or called forsaken. The Church has reformed and evolved and built bigger tables and opened the doors wider so all would know God's love.

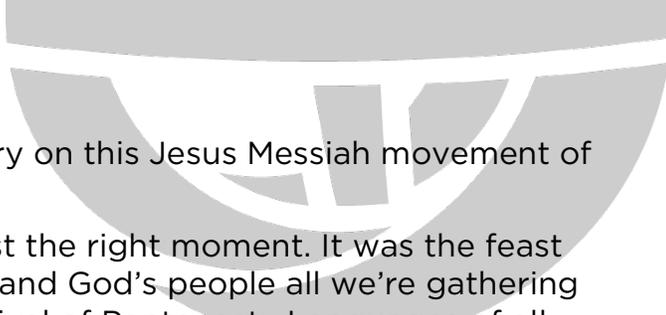
The Church has been the voice of justice, marched in the streets for civil rights and against violent wars, waved pride flags, and has spoken out against human rights violations. It has opened the doors to women to have the chance to do what I am doing now and has baptized our babies, buried our loved ones, and raised our kids. The Church has been a source of life and love and goodness and care for so many-a community who has loved us through the worst, grieved with us, rejoiced with us and held hope with us when we didn't have a lot left.

This is also true. The church has broken hearts and made them beat again, right?

I wonder if God knew that was going to be the case-that Pentecost Day so long ago-that 1st birthday of the church? Did God know that this is how it would shake out? That God's flawed and broken and deeply beautiful and powerful community would be messy like this? That the Church would be both so deeply human, and so deeply divine.

I imagine the apostles wondering- as every day came and went since the day Jesus ascended to heaven- if in fact this advocate, this Holy Spirit was going to ever come? Would they know when it did? What was this Spirit going to be like, look like, sound





like? Would this said Spirit really help them carry on this Jesus Messiah movement of love in the world?

And God -in God's style and time- waited for just the right moment. It was the feast day -a harvest festival-fifty days after Passover-and God's people all were gathering from all over together in one for the Jewish festival of Pentecost. Languages of all kinds- from every tribe -were being spoken.

Celebration was in full swing in town and the apostles were still hanging out together in a room...and just at the right moment God said now-now's the time my The Church, my Body in the world, to be birthed-and God set loose its 'Holy Spirit, and must of said- it's time to show off a bit, because they really went to work-fire, wind, understanding and clarity in chaos, a holy cacophony of voices and languages and an intoxicating awakening to Truth and God for the Apostles.

And just like that The Church was birthed. Not a building, or religion or club to belong to but a movement-a transcendent community and embodiment of God in the world.

God must have known the work of caring and leading The Church was only a job for the very breath and wisdom of God's self -the gentle breath had to be there to comfort God's people and help them hear each other better and to pray for them when they couldn't even pray for themselves.

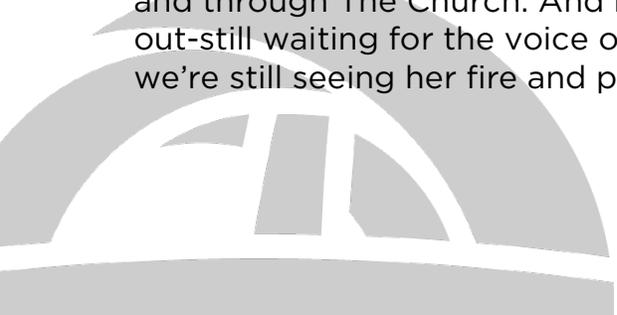
God must have known that it would take divine fire to ignite hearts with faith, that only God's Spirit could set ablaze new prophets with faith and call followers to the work of justice and restoration, that it would require an occasional rushing violent wind of God blowing through us to break down walls and systems and to forge unwanted change. That only a hovering, stirring, calling God could awaken God's People to the work of cocreating life and love and resurrection in the world.

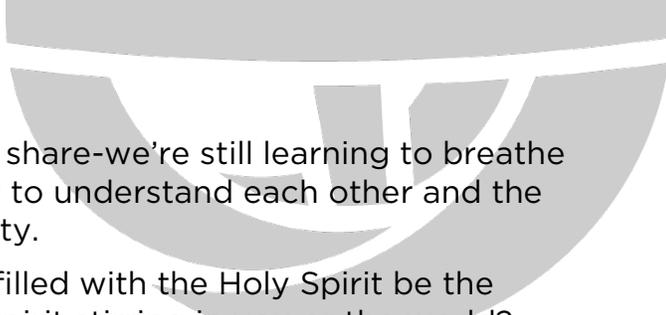
Maybe God's very self knew from the beginning as she hovered over the chaos before creation and as they breathed life and resurrection into a valley of dry dead bones, and as he descended like a dove upon Jesus at his baptism -that The Church was going to need the Holy Spirit -the Holy disrupter-her fierceness, his gentleness, their nudging and guidance.

That God's wisdom could bring order and understanding, and God's peace could settle even the most anxious of hearts and bring clarity to the most confusing decisions.

God's Spirit was needed to remind God's children that God doesn't live in a box or building but out in the world all over the world-in every nation and place and so God sent dreams and visions to men and women, young and old-people of every tribe and nation and said, "yes, we-can do this-this is who we are now."

And This birthing of the Church-this Pentecost dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit was just the beginning, right? Just the very start of the new thing God was doing in and through The Church. And here we are thousands of years later still figuring it out-still waiting for the voice of the Spirit to stir things up, and to nudge us along, we're still seeing her fire and power transform us, and still watching him give young





and old visions and dreams and gifts to use and share—we're still learning to breathe in step with God's breath, and still learning how to understand each other and the beauty and diversity of this embodied community.

So, how do we a community of Jesus followers filled with the Holy Spirit be the church in the world now? How do you feel the Spirit stirring in you or the world?

How do we discern our work as a Church as Pentecost people? How do we know, when so many are claiming to speak for God, what is truth and what is good? How do we join cocreating with God and continuing faithfully the work of the first apostles? How do we discern if the vision and dream and stirring we are having are from God and not just indigestion from a bad dinner the night before or worse how do we know if the stirring and voices we hear is not an antithesis of God? Was does unity and peace-making look like in The Church when things feel so deeply divided?

I think these are so many of the questions we're faced with as a Christian Church right now maybe perhaps in this exact moment in our country.

The questions of course aren't new—they are age old, but they are new in this moment in the world and new for this next generation of Jesus followers.

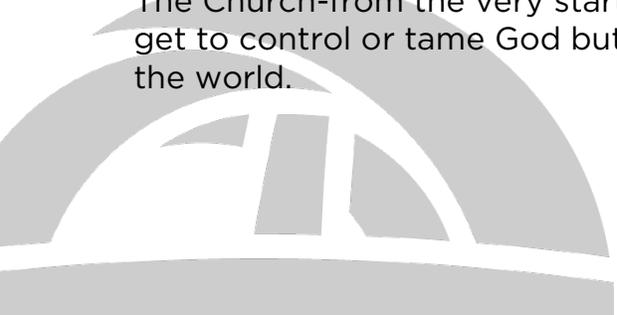
Pew Studies show trends are showing a huge decline in mainline church affiliation and attendance. Another Pew study showed only 21% of mainline protestants feel like their faith was strengthened during this pandemic (which means 80% of us did not), so some predict this truth might catalyze this decline even faster.

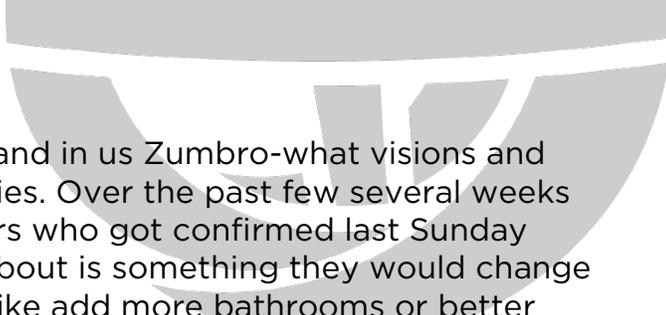
At the same time people across our country are continuing to proclaim things -often harmful and untrue things-in the name of Jesus at alarming rates-and with the access to social media it's going viral at unprecedented rates-often to the most vulnerable and youngest populations. This isolation and pandemic has done terrible trauma to many people's mental health and so they are even more vulnerable than normal to extremist views that don't smell of Jesus.

We know this all, right? My point-there is a lot of confusing things to sort out in the church and in Christianity right now and friends I think we are in need of God to pour out The Spirit upon us once again. We need the discerning and disruptive fire of justice and violent wind of change and the ability to understand each other in deeper ways and discerning voices to have new visions and dreams for way to carry out Jesus' healing and love for the world.

If we take Martin Luther's call to the church to "always reform" maybe were at again one of these crossroads moments in church history? It is going to take all of us, and a whole lot of Holy Spirit, to be The Church we're called to be right now and into the future.

Let me be clear. This urgency to be The Church in a new way isn't for our self-perseveration or to keep making ourselves feel good and safe -rather it is (and always has been) for the sake of the gospel and world. That is what it means to be The Church-from the very start on that first Pentecost day God reminded us-we don't get to control or tame God but we do get sent out and get to join The Spirits work in the world.





Just imagine what the Spirit can do through us and in us Zumbro-what visions and dreams are possible? Just imagine the possibilities. Over the past few several weeks we have met with all our confirmation 9th graders who got confirmed last Sunday afternoon. One question we ask them to write about is something they would change about The Church-we had all sorts of answers -like add more bathrooms or better vending machines to the building but the majority y'all without any prompting from anyone told us about a picture of the Church that was even more welcoming, more diverse and full of all types of God's people, fewer road blocks to be part of this Jesus following movement in the world. God's Spirit y'all have given our sons and daughters dreams...they are ready to lead us in that direction.

It's not uncommon for young people to ask me how do they know what is true and right anymore in the church -especially as they might be setting out in wilderness world of finding a church of their own -I try to tell them to look for two things...and so to end I share the same 2 things with you.

First, Look to see if this voice, or vision or dream or community is drawing you and all of God's children closer to wholeness, love, and abundant life another words does it "smell like Jesus"? and second, beware of any church, leader or community who makes faith too neat and tidy and that strips the wonder from the story of God.

This Pentecost story reminds us of these truths...the Church and faith is holy and life giving and smells of Jesus and is also fiery and messy and rarely neat and tidy-That's how the Holy Spirit rolls. May it be so with us. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Happy Birthday, Church.

