

Holy Agitation (Blowing in the Wind)

Acts 2: 1-12

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 nation 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?"

Oh it's Pentecost y'all! Happy Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove, Lord, the Giver of Life day! It's the day when Presbyterians are given permission to NOT be the "frozen chosen." Some even say it's the birthday of the church. So Happy birthday, church!

But go way back to the moment when it all began and notice how the Spirit's entrance is described. A rush of violent wind, storming in like a freight train. Flames shooting down from the clouds like rain. People starting to speak other languages without any help from Google translate or Duolingo! People are astonished and amazed and wondering what is going on! The scene is chaotic, as everyone hears the good news; and things get way out of control like people dancing in the pews.

But let's be honest, if we know anything about God's Spirit it is that she does what she does when she does it. And, like the direction the wind blows, it is often totally outside of our control. Which is tough news for those of us who like to know the plan ahead of time. I mean, the people in Jerusalem knew something was going to happen—they just didn't know what or how. You see, the reason they are all gathered from all over the place is because there is a Jewish festival taking place, called Shavout—or what's referred to as the Festival of Weeks which celebrates the moment Moses was given the commandments on Mount Sinai. Remember God shows up in a cloud, with thunder and lightning, and our bible says God down upon the mountain "in fire." This happened precisely seven weeks (or 49 days) after the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt. So while the crowd is there to celebrate the giving of the commandments, something else is occurring 49 days after Jesus' resurrection. What they weren't expecting is that the fire on the mountain is now the fire falling down upon them and the good news is being spoken on their tongues, not in their language, but in other's language. And it is astonishing and confusing and full of holy agitation.

Have you ever had a moment when the Spirit's wind blew you a bit outside of your comfort zone? Yes, the Holy Spirit is our comforter and advocate, but she is also our agitator!

The Holy Spirit is an agitator whose wind opens our hearts wider. The agitation comes in the form of a movement like during the Civil Rights where, again and again, Dr. King, and Ella Baker, and others were called "outside agitators." Darn right they were! Society needs agitation so it can move toward justice. The agitation comes in the form of our Broad Based Organizing where we listen to people's stories of where they are experiencing pressure in our city, which will more than likely break our hearts—which is a good thing because it means our hearts are growing wider. Agitation comes in the form of welcoming a group of non-english speakers into our church, who long to hear the good news in their language (*Eres amado—you are loved*). The church doesn't become the church without some holy agitation for the sake of opening our hearts wider and taking us to a place where we more than likely wouldn't get to on our own.

I recently heard a story from Boni, who is a PCUSA minister, who used to worship here, but over the last year has served a small and struggling church in Advance, just down the road. She said she had just preached a sermon to her church about how the church is called to love and embrace anyone who walks through the doors. "It doesn't matter who they are," she said, "they too are a child of God!" She said she had some people in mind when she preached this. But then the following week, which just happened to be Easter Sunday, a visitor arrived halfway through the service. She was clearly intoxicated, and just before the benediction she disrupted the service saying, "I would like to give a testimony!" So Boni was thinking probably what most of us would think: *Ohhh boy...what is coming*. So Boni just said, "Let's do the benediction first, and then whoever would like to stay, you are invited to hang out and listen." Well, everyone stayed and listened as this woman poured out her story about her struggles with addiction which she said led to her daughter being taken away from her. She said that she had already reached rock bottom and how everyone she meets is trying to help her get sober. Which is what Boni assumed she was there for: to get help. After many people thanked her for sharing and tried to offer resources, the woman said something to Boni that got under Boni's skin. The woman said, "Everyone is well-intended, but you're not hearing me. I'm not looking to get sober, I'm looking to be loved. Just as I am." Now I lost my best friend to alcoholism a few years ago, so it agitated me. But Boni says she felt like it was a Holy Spirit moment which opened her eyes and heart to the profound good news she preached to the church a week earlier when she said, "It doesn't matter who they are...they too are a child of God." And it's curious, confusing, agitating.

This out of our control wind. This uncomfortable opening of the heart. This holy agitation is how the church was brought into being 2000 years ago. And it's how the church is brought into being today. The Spirit opening our hearts to take us a bit further than we can ever get to on our own. So may we discover along this journey that this holy agitation means we are in the presence of the Holy Spirit. And may we be open to where the wind takes us to next.