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Text: Acts 2:1-21

### ***Welcome Holy Spirit***

*Prayer: Confront us, Holy God, with wind and fire and the rush of your Holy spirit that transforms life. We are amazed at what we do not understand and tempted to dismiss wonders beyond our experience. Break through our reserve to set us free. As we listen with expectancy, grant us courage to accept the challenges in our lives today, and to work with your spirit to bend it all towards a blessing for this broken world...*

My husband stood with his back to me looking out our dining room window, and asked me in an earnest tone whether I was “as concerned as he was about the cannibals on the lawn.” ... “Cannibals? I repeated, No, I am not worried about cannibals on the lawn...in our town?” He turned around to look at me; alarmed ... this conversation wasn’t coming together for me.

Last year I had a hearing test which revealed that I had moderate hearing loss, which meant in my case that I had a diminished capacity for hearing everyday speech. I was informed that it was a common, treatable, form of hearing loss and that they could help me to restore my hearing with hearing aids. While I didn’t welcome this news, it didn’t surprise me... seemed to me that lots of people were mumbling...I kept asking people to turn towards me when they were speaking...

The bad news is that I had lost my ears to hear, the good news is that with help I could learn to use devices to gain back my hearing. Being a good listener is something I value, and seek to be.

Cannibals showing up mid-conversation were bad news. As my husband gently told me his concern about the chemicals on our lawn affecting the nearby waterway, I realized I’d need to ask for a hearing adjustment again. There never were any cannibals; instead, the danger in this instance was in the failed communication – not having ears to hear.

Pentecost was a miracle of speech, of hearing, and understanding. There were no cannibals at Pentecost! There was a clarity of message – spoken and received.

In Acts 2 the disciples are gathered together in Jerusalem and as the Holy Spirit came upon them there, they were able to speak and be understood in other languages – so that the story about Jesus was able to be translated and carried into other cultures and languages appropriately. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia... a great list of countries, moving east to west, some of them mythical – suggesting to those who first heard this that the story of Jesus was carried out geographically 360 degrees, relating to all 12 signs of the zodiac, moving out into the great wide world as they imagined it in their day.

There is a long and interesting theological debate spanning most of the 2000 years now about the exact nature of the Pentecost miracle. Some have argued it was a miracle of speech, that the miracle took place in the mouths of the disciples and they spoke in languages they did not know. Some have argued it was a miracle of hearing, that the location of the miracle was in the ears of those who heard, had ears to hear. Others have argued it was a miracle of understanding, which is a function of the brain. The text doesn't settle on which area the miracle happened in, you can argue any one of the three or all three together. The text argues that it happened, and that something was begun on that day, the Holy Spirit was let loose in this gathering, in a way that is still very much alive and in our world.

What light can you give to the world in this time of pandemic? How can you enlighten those in your sphere? How is the Holy Spirit moving 360 degrees around us, coloring outside the lines of where and how we expect God to act?

In the last scene in the movie, *Places in the Heart*, a movie that tells a story about a lot of violence and injustice, in the very last scene everyone is gathered in a little church for communion. As the service proceeds, we look up and realize that present there is the man who was murdered years earlier, and the man who murdered him as well – they pass communion between the living and the dead members of their community. They are all there together. The Spirit of God transcends language, geography, and time. It is a beautiful image of how the Holy Spirit holds us together.

The good news was first given in other languages, times and cultures; but from the beginning it was also meant to find us. There are days when doing the right thing is not at all the easy thing. There are days when we do our best, dig deep, and make precious little progress. As people of faith, we need to be careful that that kind of thing doesn't confuse us. Today, the family of faith exists here, gathering the living and the dead. This may be clearer to you watching this, than it is to me. I'm talking about how the Spirit of God holds us with the communion of saints...even while I am alone, (with a few birds) talking to a camera. I'm not necessarily feeling it right now, but I believe in it, and I have seen evidence of it from time to time: talking with you on the phone or on Zoom, hearing it in your voice...we are not alone.

The same spirit that appeared among the disciples is all around us, today. You don't need to do anything, but just to know, to know that the power, the tremendous power of the spirit of God, surrounds us, upholds us, moves through us. And even though we may have sad days in this pandemic, because of it, or complicated by it, the Holy Spirit even now is moving in unpredictable ways, bending our lives toward the good. Listen, it's the sound like a rush of violent wind, speak your truth to power, God's spirit is alive in our world – more potent than a pandemic, bringing us all around to blessing no matter how far, no matter how broken, no matter how alone we are.

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