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Bethel UCC
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Acts 2: 1-21
Pentecost!

Chaos of the Spirit

Will you pray with me?

Holy Spirit, who rouses us out of complacency and comfort, may you be with us in this time of upheaval. Help us to stay present in the midst of swirling winds, help us to hear your spirit, your truth always. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, for you are my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

For the past four days, I've been taking a little vacation time at Wallowa Lake.

My family has a cabin nestled up in the trees there, built in the 1930s, going back four generations. I'm sure we have our own bit of history to confront and acknowledge in the region – which was the home of the Wallowa Band of the Nez Perce.

For most of my life, the cabin, has been my safe place. It stay consistent. Unchanging. Sure, there's a new curtain here, a fresh coat of paint there, but the chairs, the dishes, even the towels are the same ones from my childhood.

There's comfort in places that go unchanged.

And when I need rest, when I need to bury my head in a book or three, the cabin is where I go.

It's a good place to escape the real world.

Now, don't get me wrong, Wallowa Lake and the surrounding towns have their own dose of real worldness – it's not Oz, it's just when I go there, I tend to do my best to tune it out.

So, that's what I did this week. I checked my phone sparingly. I read a good book, went for a few hikes, sat by the lakeshore.

And then yesterday morning, we packed up the car and headed back to the real world.

And it was driving down into Pendleton that the sky changed...

What had been a cornflower blue turned suddenly darker, a little ominous..

Lightning cracked the sky open. Rain started and stopped.

And then the winds came.

I've experienced windy roads coming up the Gorge. I've never experienced wind like this.

Anything not strapped down flew past us.

We drove past a minivan that had been blown off the road. A semi that had flipped over the barrier. Many cars pulled over with folks braving the winds to check on drivers and call for help.

And as we drove, cautiously, with that unnerving calm that flows ice cold through your veins when fear accompanies it, I started to check the news.

Curfews set in Seattle.

Killer Mike, rapper, activist and civic leader, urging people to stay home in Atlanta.

Reports of outside agitators, white nationalists, capitalizing on the protests to spread mayhem and violence in Minneapolis.

George Floyd.

Breonna Taylor.

Ahmaud Arbery.

So much grief and anger and fear and exhaustion reaching a boiling point.

Voices raised in agony, in song, in shouts, in hope – voices crying out for the sacredness of human life.

A cry that goes unheard far too often in this country.

But never unheard by God.

The Holy Spirit is moving.

Buffeted by 60 mph winds driving along the Gorge, I read story after story of the Spirit moving.

Protestors crying out to be heard by a country that has so often turned a deaf ear. Crying out in hope, in grief, in fear, in rage – crying out to be heard.

Like a great fire, a great wind, the Holy Spirit sweeps among us.

It swept among the disciples that day, the day we call the birthday of the church.

It carried them out of the room, their safe place, their cabin by the lakeshore, right into the masses.

Men (and women) from ALL over the world, gathered in Jerusalem, seeking truth.

And suddenly, miraculously, Peter and the disciples, given the gift of speech.

They can be heard. More than that, they can be understood.

Each person who found their way to Jerusalem, hearing the language of home on the lips of a stranger.

It's a moment where there is nothing to do but wake up in awe. To be amazed. To sit up and take notice.

But for some... for whom the impossible is simply impossible, for whom discomfort is to be avoided at all costs...

the moment is lost as they search for an explanation, any explanation, that will let them live their lives, uninterrupted... unruffled.

"These people are all drunk!"

Beware, my friends, of our very human tendency to explain away and distract.

Distraction is what the media has learned to give us.

Distraction from the important reason for the protests, is what divisive forces like white nationalists, want.

Distraction is what closes down our hearts and our minds to the hard truths expressed.

Distraction lets us absolve ourselves and go about our business.

Distraction keeps us comfortable in our separate bubbles of indignation.

So, instead, on this Pentecost Sunday, do not let yourself be distracted. Open yourself to the discomfort.

Sit with the fear, hold onto the grief, do not turn away from the pain of your neighbor.

You may not believe it, but they're speaking your language.

These moments are hard – they are painful – frightening and disorienting – but they are truth-tellers.

We have to wake up and pay attention. No retreating into our comfort.

The Holy Spirit is not here to make you comfortable.

She's here to wake you up.

She is in the voices of those who cry out for George Floyd.

For Breonna Taylor.

For Ahmaud Arbery.

The Holy Spirit is with those who in their grief and their rage, come together to stand up for the sanctity of human life. Most especially, Black life.

As the church in 2020, in the midst of a pandemic where Black people are dying at a significantly higher rate than White people...

in a country where Black and Brown communities continued to be viewed with suspicion and fear...

where our systems of law CONTINUE to protect and serve white communities while terrorizing our neighbors of color...

we have work to do.

In this text, we are not the people speaking in many languages and spreading the word of God.

We are the people who need to listen.

Listen carefully. And be careful about the sources to whom we listen – because dear ones, there are people who will use a moment of fear and division to spread misinformation and conspiracies.

So, pay attention to your sources.

And stay in the discomfort.

Our work is to listen. Read. Learn.

Examine ourselves carefully.

And stand in solidarity.

To fight for, to work towards, a country where justice and mercy extends to the farthest reaches of our communities – where no person is too powerful, too wealthy, too white, to get away with murder and no person is too poor, too vulnerable, too black, to have their life not matter, to have their death be made a spectacle of.

Through this important work, my friends, remember to breathe.

Breathe deep. Pray. Sit still occasionally. Discern carefully. And always, always, seek the true Spirit of God.

Pentecost is a day of celebration. Today, we still celebrate. We celebrate our young people, who they are and the gifts they have to offer the world...

And we celebrate the powerful Holy Spirit – sweeping among us, shaking us up, scaring us, invigorating us, leading us, loving us.

Today, we celebrate a God who is rarely interested in making us comfortable – but who is interested in life, abundant life, for all of HER GOOD creation.

Chaos of the Holy Spirit should always be regarded extremely good news.

Amen.

Benediction

May you love God enough that you love nothing else too much, and may you fear God enough that you need fear nothing else at all.