

Sermon for Sunday, May 20, 2018 - "Unsettled and Healed"

Day of Pentecost

May 20, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

I love the Day of Pentecost at Good Shepherd.

I love the beautiful red paraments and gates, the red gladiola altar flowers, the kids in procession with pin-wheels, the great music - especially amazing today with band, choir, and kids. Today we also get to celebrate graduates and Sunday School teachers and nurture a hopeful future with our special gifts. It's a wonderful, joyful day as we celebrate God's Spirit being poured out upon the church.

But when the Spirit was poured out on those first followers of Jesus, I'm guessing that joy may not have been their dominant emotion. "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind ... 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."

I'm guessing that this may have been troubling for them before it was joyful. Much of the artwork over the centuries depicting this scene shows the apostles with fear-filled faces. They'd lost control of the situation and of themselves. They were speaking in languages that they'd never spoken, never studied, perhaps never even heard. Did they even understand what they were saying as they proclaimed God's deeds of power in languages not their own?

That must have been a profoundly unsettling experience. Yet, sometimes, we need to be unsettled for our own good, for the sake of others, and for the sake of the creation that is groaning and longing for hope and good news.

For the first followers of Jesus, the outpouring of the Spirit led them beyond the boundaries of their language, their city, their country, even beyond the boundaries of their religion to speak the good news of God's deeds of power to all nations.

It led them beyond what had always been most precious to them - the thing that they were still asking Jesus about even as his ministry with them was complete and he was ascending into heaven. "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" they asked. They were holding out hope that Jesus would reign over an earthly kingdom and that they, as his followers, would have power and prosperity. They were stuck on this question and on the question about who was the greatest. Jesus tells them, again, that those are the wrong questions. He assures them that their future and the future of the world is in God's hands. He tells them that the Holy Spirit will be given to them, that they will receive power to be his witnesses.

What had always been most important to them - their nation and its unique status as God's chosen people - was set aside by the power of the Spirit. It was replaced by a new vision - a world where all people, all nations, would know God's passionate love for everyone through their witness.

The Spirit unsettled them.

The Spirit still does the same for us. We are so often stuck in asking the wrong questions, pursuing our limited vision of our preferred future, in 'us and them' thinking, and in unhelpful patterns personally and collectively - after every school shooting the same rituals happen. We grasp at control and security.

But how's that working out for us and for our world? Not so well. We need the Spirit to unsettle us and push us beyond our boundaries, out of our comfort zones.

Thankfully, the Spirit still does this for us. The Spirit draws us into worship that is meant to both trouble and comfort us. We come together with other people which always has the potential to be troubling. We hear weird scripture passages that don't always fit with our worldview. We share in strange rituals - undergoing the waters of death and rebirth, eating Jesus' body and blood. This is all meant, in part, to unsettle us.

Then we are sent out into the world where the Spirit leads us to be part of God's work of troubling and healing the world.

This happens in big ways and small: When we stay in a difficult conversation, when we let go of control and allow someone else to help us, when we stretch ourselves to advocate for others, when we seek to remain open to a disturbing idea or person.

In all these ways, and so many others, the Spirit is at work to unsettle us so that we and others may experience good news, know hope and joy, and be part of the healing of creation. Thankfully, the Spirit doesn't only unsettle us. The second reading today assures us that that the Spirit also intercedes for us. The Spirit prays for us and with- in us with sighs too deep for words. Which means, when we look at the world and feel despair, we can trust that the Spirit is using even our groans and sighs to pray within us.

Our Gospel reading today assures us that the Spirit is also our advocate and comforter - by our side, walking with us.

Whatever emotions you feel today, know that the Spirit is at work in you, for you and through you for the sake of the world. The Spirit is at work to unsettle us and heal us and send us out.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.

