

Holy Sprit Holes

Acts 2:1-21

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?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But 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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

The Dark Ages were from the fifth century to the eleventh century. They came after the fall of the Roman Empire and before Europe's time of Enlightenment. During these 600 years food was scarce, people lived hand-to-mouth, and western civilization hung by a thread. But there was one bright spot in the darkness. Medieval people could gather for Christian comfort and care at the local cathedral.

Our medieval forebears were illiterate and didn't have the Bible we know today. This was before the invention of the printing press. The cathedral was their sacred text. There were paintings and murals, sculptures and icons, stained-glass windows and painted domes, drama and pageantry in worship. The stories of the Christian faith were told through these images. Cathedrals were basically massive, open Bibles.

They also served as centers of community life much like our church. They were the courthouse for distributing justice. They were safe havens for weary travelers. The presence of a large, busy

cathedral in your village meant a stable economic base. The cathedral required many workers who tended to be more literate and educated.

The main purpose of a cathedral was the center for a region's religious life. The cathedral was the soul of its village – again like our church. Cathedrals were charged with caring for all the individuals in the community.

But remember, these were hard times. Basic survival was a full-time occupation for most people. Religious faith wasn't a convenience or habit. It was the main life support system for poor and struggling people. The cathedral offered everyone a source of comfort, beauty and security.

Harvard scholar Diana Eck reveals some surprises about these medieval cathedrals in her book Encountering God. During the dark ages, the church calendar shaped people's daily lives. Festivals, saint's days, holy days were lived in the world of the medieval church. The church helped people observe these days, so they remained the guiding force their daily lives.

Professor Eck discovered that Pentecost was a creative celebration in the church's calendar. The 10th-century church really knew how to throw a party. It made the coming of the Holy Spirit a dramatic event. Worship leaders on Pentecost not only used music and prayers to celebrate, they also used the church's architecture.

Paintings of heavenly scenes were located on cathedrals' great domed and vaulted ceilings. They inspired the devout with blessed visions. They also disguised secret trap doors. Small openings were drilled through the cathedral ceiling to the rooftop.

On the Day of Pentecost, servants would be climb up on the roof. At the appropriate time during worship, they would release live doves through the holes. Out of the painted skies and clouds of the cathedral ceiling came swooping symbols of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, the choir would make a whooshing and drumming sound like a holy windstorm. As the doves were flying and the winds were rushing, the ceiling holes were opened again, and bushels of rose petals were showered upon the congregation. These red, flickering bits of flowers symbolized tongues of flame falling upon from the heavens.

These roof top openings were known as "Holy Spirit Holes." Professor Eck said, "We need these Holy Spirit holes. Our churches need these skyward openings to the wind rush of God.... Holy Spirit holes would be perpetual reminders...that our knowledge of God is not complete. They would ceaselessly remind us that no image or icon, no petal or flame can domesticate God's Spirit. Its symbolic images, like the dove and the wildfire, are images of utter freedom."

It's a shame our church ceiling doesn't have a Holy Spirit hole. Instead of being open to God's Spirit, it feels like you and I are living in a spiritual vacuum where no breath of wind blows and no flames of fire ignite. Instead of experiencing doves and flames swooping out from "Holy Spirit holes," our souls, like our well-insulated ceiling, are closed to any surprise visits from God.

Jesus' disciples were the same boat before Pentecost. They were closed off from the world and living in a spiritual vacuum. They were waiting and praying in that upper room. The last thing Jesus said is that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit. But they had no idea what he meant.

They probably asked God what was going to happen. How would they know when the Spirit touched them? Would it tingle? Would it hurt? How did the Holy Spirit baptize people? Jesus mentioned something about fire. Did he mean real fire or spiritual fire? Should they have some jars with water available just in case?

They didn't have to wait long for answers. On the day of Pentecost, they got a crash course in spiritual power. First there was wind. Then there was fire. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowed with strange languages: one spoke Parthian, another spoke Latin, and two others spoke Egyptian and Arabic.

They didn't know what they were saying, but the crowd did. Devout Jews from the known world stood in the doorway and windows. They listened to this bunch of Galilean hicks talk about the power of God in their native tongues and no one was left out.

It was baffling to both the speakers and the listeners. They experienced something miraculous. Some made up an explanation. They said, "They are filled with new wine" which meant they were drunk. But Peter said no, it was only nine o'clock in the morning which meant we're as sober as a judge.

Then Peter gets up and delivers a sensational sermon based on the second chapter of Joel. He quotes the prophet who was quoting God: "In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Peter explained. God's Spirit is being poured out and this is what it looks like: \wind like the wind that revived the valley of dry bones, fire like the fire that led Israel through the desert, tongues like the tongues that erupted at Babel, but in reverse this time.

At Babel, God confused human speech so people couldn't understand each other. At Pentecost, God reverses the curse. What sounds like babble is plain speech – it is gospel/good news - and everyone understands.

Now according to the author of Acts, three thousand people were baptized that day. It was the birth of the Christian church. What happened in that room spread from Jerusalem to Athens to Rome to Alexandria. It spread across nations, across centuries, and across cultures. It spread to the ends of the earth including Jemez Springs.

Yes, you and I are the spiritual heirs of Pentecost. We stand in a long, long line of believers who have waited and prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" And like our spiritual ancestors we feel uncertain about the request. We have our doubts and questions. Spirit-filled and Pentecostal makes some of us a little nervous.

As Episcopal priest Alan Jones said “Only a fool would pray for the Holy Spirit... (that is) only fools for Christ...” because the Spirit is present at three inopportune times in our lives: “in the unpredictable, in the place of risk and in those areas over which we have no control.”

God’s Spirit comes to us during the unpredictable, risky and uncontrolled times in our lives. I found that to be true over the years, especially this past year. Last March the Spirit led us to do Zoom worship even though I was clueless about how. 62 Sundays later it became comfortable and easy. I hope we can continue to offer worship online for our out-of-town siblings.

Coming back to in-person worship may feel unpredictable, risky and uncontrollable for some of us. We’ve been living masked and social distanced lives for the past 14 months. Now the science says, those of us who are vaccinated can resume our new normal – worshipping, eating, praying, singing, fellowshiping, and doing ministry together – all without masks and distancing.

It’s up to each one of us to decide how we’re going to live in this new reality. Will I continue to wear a mask? Will I continue to social distance? Will I get vaccinated to protect others and myself? Will I stop believing the lies and conspiracy theories on social media? God’s Spirit is here to guide, inform and bless us in our decision making. May we all have ears to hear and hearts to act.

The Spirit does come to us in the unpredictable, risky and uncontrolled times in our lives. You will find this to be true after I retire. It’s been 20 years since this church searched for a new pastor. We Presbyterians have a well-defined process and Santa Fe Presbytery’s Commission on Ministry will be a help and guide just like they were when I came here and five years ago when I was sick.

The process of searching for a new pastor and finding someone to help during the transition will feel unpredictable, risky and uncontrolled at times. But remember that’s when God’s Spirit is with us just as it was with the disciples on Pentecost. I believe the Holy Spirit will guide you just as it did when I was called here in 2002.

I also believe this church will have more than one pastoral candidate to choose from when the time comes. Y’all are a healthy, small church with a great facility and strong leadership. Y’all are located in a desirable location and we’ve proven that part-time pastoral ministry here can be fruitful and meaningful.

Beloved Pentecost reminds us God's Spirit is always unpredictable, risky and uncontrollable. God’s Spirit can set us on fire. It can blow us to new places. It can empower and transform our lives. God’s Spirit can turn this world upside down.

All we need to do is open a Holy Spirit hole in our hearts and in this church. All we need to do is pray, “Come, Holy Spirit, come.” And then wait and watch for the results.

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