

Spirit Lessons
A Sermon for Pentecost
Act. 2
May 24, 2020
Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer: Come Spirit come fall again on believers here and everywhere...

Message:

How is it, two people can hear the same thing and their responses be different? As a parent and as a former educator, this is something I marvel at. I give the same set of directions to my children, “put the dishes away,” they hear the same words, and yet, one child takes it to mean all the dishes in the strainer and in the dishwasher, while the other takes it to mean only the dishes you can see. I direct them to “clean your room” and one straightens up the bed, cleans up the floor, and puts dirty clothes in the laundry basket. The other moves the pile of dirty clothes from their room to the hallway and throws the blanket over whatever might be on the bed. How is it that a parent speaks the same words yet what is heard varies from ear to ear? It is a mystery.

The same is true I suppose every time I preach a sermon. I often wonder how so many people hear the same words but have such varied responses. I often wonder how what I think I am saying is heard differently than I expected. It is a mystery.

How is it we can read or hear the same words and yet have very different responses? How can we hear the same words and they impact us differently. It is a mystery I am sure, answered only with long drawn out responses, in depth theological perspectives, and highly trained academicians. Or is it?

The heavy hitting, yet soft hearted pastor, poet, musician, and legend Mr. Rogers discovered the answer while in New England one weekend when he and some friends decided to visit the church of a well-known and well-respected preacher. After the service began however, they discovered the presiding minister was away and a supply preacher, an aged one at that, would be speaking in his place.

That was, of course, disappointing, but Fred Rogers had heard good supply preachers before, as well as meaningful messages from older preachers. Unfortunately, this man apparently was neither good nor meaningful. Fred suffered through the sermon, mentally checking off every homiletic rule the man was bending, breaking, or completely disregarding.

The sermon went against everything Fred was learning in seminary. When it ended (mercifully) he turned to the friend beside him to commiserate. But before he could say anything, his words were muted by the tears he saw streaming down her face.

“He said exactly what I needed to hear,” she whispered.

That bungle of a sermon was exactly what she needed to hear? Fred didn't know what to say. But as he began to ponder the gulf between their reactions, he realized that the essential difference lay within: she had come in need and he had come in judgement. And because of her need, and the sincerity of the old preacher, the Holy Spirit created a pentecost moment and was able to translate the words, poorly constructed as they were, into exactly what she needed to hear. (The Simple Faith of Mr. Rogers pg. 34-35).

Mystery solved. Thank you Mr. Rogers.

The mystery of the presence, movement, and power of the Holy Spirit has a long history, dating back to the day it happened and the utter bewilderment of some of the witnesses.

Listen to the words of Luke, recorded in Act. 2 and how he describes what has become a defining moment in the life of believers and the birth of what was to become called the church.

Read Text Acts 2:1-11

Think for a moment what the disciples had been through over the last several weeks - three years with Jesus watching, observing, learning; all leading to a big parade in Jerusalem where the disciples watched Jesus be treated and hailed as a hero. Then in the same week, they see him rejected, despised, tortured and killed. Three days later, as he said, he rose from the dead defeating death itself. A few

days and a little more time with him and then he is gone, ascended into heaven with the promise that the Holy Spirit will come and carry on with them.

Their heads perhaps still spinning, questions perhaps still brewing, and hearts still reeling, this band of believers gathers and waits, watches and wonders, hopes and anticipates what is to happen next is something of good news; something positive, something they could count on.

What happened was beyond any expectation they could have imagined! But hold that thought, because while they (the disciples) were gathered and waiting in Jerusalem, Jews from around the known world gathered for the festival of weeks, a harvest festival; a time when Jews would celebrate God giving Moses the Torah, or the book of Law (first five books of the Bible) on Mt. Sanai.

There would have been Jews from what is now modern day Turkey, Libya, Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Greece, and Saudi Arabia. These would have been devout Jews; meaning they Torah keeping (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy); law abiding, and ritual honoring Jewish believers. They did not ignore or deny the presence or life of Jesus, but they did not believe him to be the son of God.

Both groups gathered in the same place. Both for different reasons but perhaps both needing the same thing - the assurance of God and truth of Jesus.

The first followers of Jesus waiting in Jerusalem would not have known the mother languages of all those Jews gathered there for the festival. Scholars say they would have had to travel to those regions, studied the languages in meticulous ways, learning the culture and politics and nuances. They had not done all that in all those places in a matter of three years while with Jesus.

It was and is one of the most incredible miracles ever to happen to this band of believers. They spoke the same words to all those around them, and by God's Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus, all of them, from all those different places, heard and understood in their own language the "mighty works of God" through Jesus." (vs. 11)

What is offered in faith by one person, or in this case, a group of people, can be translated by the Holy Spirit into what the other person (or people) need to hear and see. The space between them, as Mr. Rogers declares, "is holy ground and the

Holy Spirit uses that space in ways that not only translate, but transcend” and I would add transform! (The Simple Faith of Mr. Rogers pg. 34-35). What was said was translated into what they would know and recognize and the perceived limitations were transcended by God’s presence and all were transformed. Pentecost!

The difference is a matter of need or judgement. Just like when Mr Rogers went with friends to hear the supply preacher. Do we hear words that are spoken and receive them from a place of openness, vulnerability, and honesty or a place of anger, intolerance, and frustration? Do we hear words that are spoken or even the words we speak from places of bitterness, criticism, and impatience or do we hear and speak them from places of hope, positive action, and empathy.

Stick with me and see if it makes any sense this way:

How many of you are tired of the word or phrase, “in these unprecedented times...” or “we are living in a new normal.”? What about “we are in this together,” and “staying connected apart.”

March 13 was the last day our kids were in school - that’s 10 weeks ago and right after that, we went to a statewide shelter in place. 2 months and 2 weeks. For some it has gone by actually pretty quick and for others it feels like forever.

Either way, it’s been long enough that more and more people are expressing words of frustration, anxiety, anxiousness, anger, and bitterness. More and more people are feeling the impact of isolation, stress, and mental fatigue. And the words, “we are in this together” only go so far after 10 weeks. Emotions and patience are wearing thin in some places, while tolerance and positivity are even thinner in some cases.

Now more than ever church, we need pentecost - we need to listen for the rushing wind of the Spirit; we need to recognize a power greater than our own rests in the hands of God and it is by the Holy Spirit we are bound one to another in moments like these. We need to know there is something at work in, around and through us. We need to hold on to the same promise those early followers did and trust that the space between us is holy ground touched by God’s Holy Spirit - something that has the power and ability to transcend our understanding, translate what we do not comprehend, and transform our situation and circumstance into that which brings us closer to God and one another...a defining moment then and a

defining moment now, led by the Holy Spirit if we but come in openness, seeing the hope-filled moments rather than the pain-filled circumstances.

It doesn't take the bad news away. It doesn't give us all the answers. It doesn't necessarily make facing tomorrow easier, but it does make it bearable. It does make it endurable. It does somehow, in a way that only the spirit of God can, make it more tolerable.

So when we once again hear the words, we are in this together, we seek a new normal, or in these unprecedented times, perhaps we can allow the Spirit to translate those words into what our hearts need to hear, our minds need to render, and our souls need to digest.

The next time you hear "we are in this together", maybe what is being said or translated by the Spirit is, "the struggle is real and you are not alone in how you feel or what you think." We are together in our isolation, uncertainty, and uneasiness.

The next time you hear "a new normal" maybe what is being said is that things can be different, we can be different, we can be better.

The next time you hear "these are unprecedented times," maybe what is being said or translated is this is not humanity's first rodeo with struggle. This isn't the first time humanity has seen, experienced, endured, and weathered disaster, challenge, and defeat before and risen above it; it doesn't mean we can't find a way through and learn something about what it means to be God's people living in and for God's purpose.

What is it you need to hear in this pentecost moment? How can the Holy Spirit translate what is happening around you into what you need at this moment - during these days?

How will you let the Spirit Lessons of Pentecost translate, transcend, and transform your life right now, today and in the days ahead. May God be with us all and make it so.

Come Holy Spirit come, bind us together in ways that cannot be broken.
Come Holy Spirit come, fill us with wisdom, unity, and truth.

Come Holy Spirit come, ignite love & hope that we may be transformed.

AMEN