

Rev. Dr. Anne Bain Epling
Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church
May 23, 2010
Pentecost Sunday
Acts 2:1-21
Installation and Ordination of Elders

“A Mission from God”

Have you ever seen the movie “The Blues Brothers”? It’s about two brothers, Jake and Elwood, who have a blues band. After Jake’s release from prison, he and Elwood decide to go and visit the old orphanage where they were raised by nuns. There, they learn that the church stopped supporting the orphanage and has plans to sell it. The only way to keep the place open is if the \$5000 tax on the property is paid within 11 days. The brothers want to help and decide to put their blues band back together and raise the money by staging a big gig. As they set off they seem to make more enemies than friends. Will they manage to come up with the money in time?

Now, you may be thinking, “What the heck does “The Blues Brothers” have to do with Pentecost?” A lot! If you’ve seen the movie you know the Blues Brothers are on a mission from God. “Me and the Lord, we got an understanding,” Jake says. “Yeah, we’re on a mission from God,” replies Elwood.

Those disciples, they were on a mission from God. The Holy Spirit made sure of that.

You know, there’s a troublemaker in every family, and in the family of the Trinity-God, Christ, and Holy Spirit - the Holy Spirit is the troublemaker. On Pentecost the Spirit comes in like the rush of a violent wind, filling the entire house and then rests like a tongue of fire on each of the disciples. Now, you just know when something like that happens there’s bound to be drama. There’s nothing quite like a dramatic entrance and the Holy Spirit knows how to make one.

We’ve tried to tame her over the years. We used to refer to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost. Remember that? I don’t know when we switched the language, and I don’t know why we switched. I’m sure there was a scriptural reason for it, but there was probably a realistic reason, too, and that is that Holy Ghost is just too darn scary for us. So we tamed her and started calling her Holy Spirit and now, sometimes, simply Spirit. One of our prettier hymns sings of the Spirit of gentleness, but in Jerusalem 2000 years ago the Spirit was anything but gentle. Fire is not gentle. Violent winds are not gentle. This is not a gentle spirit. This is a bold Holy Spirit that bewilders the crowd and calls the disciples to attention.

The Spirit kicked those disciples to the curb – made them get out there and do something with all that stuff Jesus taught them — and basically gave them the same message the nun gave to Jake and Elwood – don’t come back until your mission is done.

Up until the Holy Spirit's arrival the disciples were pretty much just hanging out. They left Galilee after Jesus ascended to heaven, went to Jerusalem like the angel instructed them to do, and elected Mathias to replace Judas. But that was about it. For all we know they were sitting around reminiscing about the good old days and kind of feeling sorry for themselves that their best days with Jesus were behind them.

But then the Holy Spirit comes, just like Jesus promised, and breaks up their little pity party.

“Whoa, what just happened? What *was that?*” They started speaking in all these different languages as the Spirit prompted them to speak. And the cacophony of sounds got the attention of the passersby. “Aren't these people talking Galileans?” the passersby ask. Just so you know, Galileans were not exactly known for their cultural sophistication. They weren't the type to be fluent in other languages, unlike the sophisticated inhabitants of Jerusalem. It was sort of like New Jersey meets Manhattan, and Manhattan can't get over the fact that they understand New Jersey.

They were amazed and perplexed and asked “What does this mean?” Well, almost everyone asked that. There were a couple people who thought the disciples had started happy hour a little too early. But Peter jumps to his feet and says, “Not true! It's only 9:00 in the morning!”

So Peter begins to explain to them that everything that is happening is the fulfillment of an oracle prophesied long ago: 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.”

Here Peter is quoting the prophet Joel from a passage I love, because it tells us to THINK BIG; dream dreams, and don't limit yourself, because nothing is impossible with God.

I was reminded of this last week when I heard the preacher at Presbytery tell the story of Fourth Presbyterian Church's beginnings. It was founded in February 1871, and by October of that same year it had completed building its magnificent sanctuary. On Sunday morning the young congregation held its first worship service and dedicated their building. And on Sunday night, the great Chicago fire of 1871 swept through with the rush of a violent wind and burned it all down.

They held one worship service in their sanctuary. One. They could have easily decided to hang it all up and go elsewhere and honestly, who would have blamed them? But you know they didn't. They rebuilt the church and dedicated the new one 3 years later. And 40 years after that they outgrew it and moved to Michigan Avenue. For those of you who don't know Fourth Church, it's truly a leader among leaders in our denomination. The fire may have destroyed their building, but it did not destroy their spirit.

The message of Pentecost is to dream dreams, THINK BIG, and don't limit yourself, because nothing is impossible with the Holy Spirit at your side.

As you know, today we'll ordain and install new elders. I am really excited about the new Session you should be, too, because they are thinking big and reaming dreams. When the new elders met with the current session last week for their "examination", they told us why they'd accepted the call to serve. And do you know what they said? They said things like: I said yes to serving because I love this church and I want it to succeed (this came from both long time members and newer members). "We're on the brink of great things", was a common statement among them, as was "I know I've found a church home, and I want to help" and "there's energy here-I can feel it". These are things they said! After they left one of the elders rotating off said, "Gosh, I'm sorry I'm leaving." When have you ever heard an elder say they're sorry to leave the session? Most of them run as fast as they can out the door and its months before you see them again!

This is the Spirit at work! This is Pentecost coming live! They are thinking big, seeing possibilities, and dreaming dreams. This is Pentecost at work.

Today, I want you to think about where you see Pentecost happening. Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in our midst? Last week I was challenged to write how I see the Holy Spirit at work today . . .in 100 words or less. This is not easy for a preacher to do. But I took a stab at it and here's what I wrote:

When we worship together to listen to God;
when we share our church with recovering alcoholics,
when we preach against injustice;
and till the ground out back
to grow a garden to give food away;
when the young people lead worship
and new people are welcomed;
when we get together just to have fun;
and open our sanctuary
to couples without a church,
but who want to get married in one;
when we give away money, baby items and food;
and celebrate the life and resurrection of one of the saints of the church;
it is then that Pentecost happens.

Pentecost is the promise that God is not yet done with us, that God is still working, and that God expects great things from us. If God was done with us, why would God send the Holy Spirit? Jesus could have been the final word. But even Jesus said he wasn't the final word but would send us the Holy Spirit to guide us. And that's what the Holy Spirit is; it's God in the here and now, sent to us to guide us and nurture us and sometimes kicks us to the curb until our mission is done.

The Blues Brothers had a lot of fun on their mission from God; they also got into some trouble along the way. Being on a mission from God is not for the faint of heart. But they raised the money for the orphanage just in time. Sometimes God's mission can be tricky,

and sometimes there are bumps along the way. But just when we begin to think, “I’m not so sure about this”, we realize that it’s a glorious mission and one worth taking.

Amen.

Sources:

Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3