

Psalms 104:24-34,35b

Acts 2:1-21

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway

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Pentecost Living

Not long ago I had a conversation with a couple of clergy friends about life, religion and the world today. We were talking about some scripture and also some of the current controversial topics on social media and our national landscape, as well as some of the global and national conflicts in our world today. It was a heavy conversation. One friend who is generally a pretty positive and proactive person, that day was expressing her frustration and sense of feeling overwhelmed with it all. A common feeling right now, isn't it? She had one hand on her Bible, and as she did, she made the comment that what she needed most right now was a word of hope and assurance that there is a better world to come someday. Sometimes those words seem so hard to come by.

This conversation came back to me as I considered our scripture for this morning. This story from Acts, Pentecost, the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church, *is God's answer to the need my friend expressed that day. The church of Jesus Christ in the world. Us here today.*

This church, not Stone in particular, but the Christian Church as a whole, does not seem very comforting or assuring at first look. Sometimes, often even, some would claim, the church in the world is *not* the place to look for hope and assurance of a better world to come - far from it. We could look at our church, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. or the Christian Church as a whole, and find all kinds of examples throughout history of times when organized Christian religion has not come close to being a source of hope and assurance.

Even from the very beginning this church did not look very promising. A violent wind, tongues of fire and the good news of Jesus Christ tumbling off of people's lips in so many languages that people thought they were drunk. Hope and assurance of a better world to come are not the first things that come to mind in the

face of this kind of chaos and confusion and multitude of diverse opinions and lifestyles!

Yet this was the beginning of our church. And, one could argue that it is not too far off from the church today. A body of believers, people, with different voices, different histories, often trying to figure out who they are and what they are about, and sometimes filled with more passion and conviction and direction than they know how to convey. Never perfect, always searching.

And yet this is who we are. In fact this is who God creates us, the church of Jesus Christ in the world today, to be - a community of varied, flawed, Spirit filled, called together people.

Today, Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the birthday of the Christian Church – that far from perfect body of which we are a part. Today is a day, not to overlook our flaws and our differences, but to remember with rejoicing, who we are. To enjoy the beautiful decorations in the sanctuary and the colors we wear. Pentecost is an important day in our life together, because it is the day we celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit in our midst – God with us in the form of the Holy Spirit. And the glorious truth that because of that presence, *because by the power of the Holy Spirit* we are more than our flaws and our differences. Today we can affirm the promise of a better world to come.

The story we read this morning, of the first Pentecost, reminds us that this Pentecost living, this Spirit filled living, is not always a clear and easy path though. In fact it often is not. Like the friend I mentioned, there are times in our lives when it is not easy to see where the spirit is calling us or how the spirit is at work in a particular moment in time. To some, the first Pentecost surely must have been a terrifying time.

But this story also reminds us of the power of God. To take a group of people separated by language and culture, economic standing and faith background, and bring them together in one place and send them out with a message that changed lives over and over again. God continues to work in ways that surprise and amaze us.

Not long ago I read an article in (Christian Century Magazine) by L. Gregory Jones, the president of Belmont University in Nashville. The article is entitled *Welcome Interruption*. In it he writes about the challenge of being a Christian and

how God continues to call us to strange and new places. That in fact, that is what God is about.

Jones writes, “We encounter God in the three great festivals of the church year: Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. In each of these festivals we encounter a stranger whom we cannot control: God incarnate in a baby, a traveler on the road to Emmaus, and the wind of the Spirit. We are put in question by these strange, life-giving ways in which God becomes present to us.”¹ This Pentecost we celebrate God becoming present to us in the wind of the Spirit. Often unpredictable, but sure. Because of that presence we have our word of hope and assurance for a better world.

You see that I have included in our bulletin this morning a prayer often attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero, a Catholic priest who worked for human rights in El Salvador before he was killed in 1980. Some of you may be familiar with this prayer.

As I noted in the bulletin, it has been confirmed that this prayer was never really said by Oscar Romero but has come to be associated with him because of the way he lived his life.

For me this prayer is a good reminder of the Good News of Pentecost. When we remember and celebrate and **live** Pentecost this is how we are living, this ‘long view’ living. And it is good. We work and live out our faith now knowing that God is here present with us and that God is at work through the spirit among us to bring a better world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can work for and proclaim a better world *here, now and in the future*, because God is in this world now and always.

Let us stand and pray this prayer together.

¹ Jones, L. Gregory, *Faith Matters, Christian Century*