Wrestling With the Spirit

Pentecost C-22

Acts: 2: 1-23

6/5/22

**Prayer for Illumination**

**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.’

“Wrestling With the Spirit”

It was the Greek philosopher Plutarch… not Pluto but Plutarch… who’s credited with first saying, “Life is but a moment.” Well… he really said, “The whole of life is but a moment of time. It is our duty, therefore, to use it, not to misuse it.”

It’s a good quote… which countless others have used or adapted along the way. Life is but a moment. Life is but a series of moments.

Of course, life is many other things as well. Life is a journey. Life is a gift. Life is a mystery.

And all that’s true. Life *is* a gift. A mysterious, wonderful, sometimes painful but always God-filled gift that takes place across a journey filled with many special moments.

* Some of these moments last just a millisecond but change our lives forever.
* While some moments are so painful they feel like they’ll last forever.
* Still, many moments—many—are so mundane we let them just pass on by without seeing the vast potential within them.
* And some moments… some moments are so spectacular that, even if they happened years ago, we can close our eyes and relive them time and time and time again.

In many ways, we practice that in our worship—retelling and, even, reliving moments from our ancestors in the faith who encountered God across various points and places in history.

It’s what Scripture reading is all about. Exploring the moments, events, stories from the past that, though they may have happened thousands of years ago… still speak to our world… and our lives here and now.

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Heck, in the grand scheme of things, even Jesus’ life was but a moment. It lasted 33 of humanity’s 6 million years on earth. That’s just 33 years in which he lived out the love and grace of God with every fiber of his being. Never hunkering down or saying, “enough’s enough,” but seeking to spread God’s kingdom with every single step he took.

In part, that’s how Jesus made the impact he made. He strove to make every moment count. Right up to his death and resurrection.

It was at that point, Jesus made clear, that he was handing his ministry off to his followers. Calling them—and us—to follow his lead… and start using the moments of *our* lives share the gifts and way of God… promising the power and presence of God’s very Spirit as we do.

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And this, friends, is what we gather to celebrate. It’s what we gather to retell and, in some ways, even relive today. *Pentecost*. God’s Spirit poured out on the world. God’s promise to not only be God with us… but God within us… blessing us with gifts of the Spirit and a call to use them.

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The scene Luke paints Acts is nothing short of incredible. Jesus’ followers had gathered together in the midst of Jerusalem—the cultural and economic hub of Israel. And suddenly… a violent wind and tongues of fire fell on them. All at once, they were able to somehow speak to and understand others from different places speaking different languages. Immigrant Hebrews from entirely different lands who’d heard the noise and began to gather round were stunned to hear that they could understand them. All of it testifying to the power of the Spirit to not only bless us… but unite us across our differences… leading us into a future we could have hardly fathomed before.

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But you know… as amazing as it was… as world-changing as it was… even Pentecost was just a moment.

As soon as the Spirit came down and entered into God’s children… the Spirit set off… seeking the next moment… calling God’s people to start the Church. Pushing Christ’s disciples to share what they’d learned. Calling forth new people to build up new communities dedicated to the Good News of God’s love… and all that such love entailed.

In many ways, the rest of the New Testament simply reveals this radical, nonstop movement of the Spirit… the persistent, relentless movement of God’s Spirit, as it created moment after moment… occasion after occasion for God’s people to spread love… share grace… and seek peace… in pursuit of God’s kingdom.

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And as we gather to celebrate here today, make no mistake, **the Spirit is still at it**. Perpetually… Relentlessly leading us… guiding us… pushing, prodding, cajoling us from one moment to the next… never stopping… never settling… but always… always seeking to build up God’s kingdom. To bring forth God’s future. A future we can, even now, hardly fathom. The Spirit is still at it.

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And I’ve got to tell you… I, for one… I often just want to put the Spirit in a headlock and say, “**Enough**!” “Knock it off!” Or at least… at least “slow down.” At least slow down.

Do you every just want the Spirit to take its foot off the gas… to stop pushing so relentlessly for God’s future… so we can just… I don’t know… stay where we are for a little while longer. You know what I mean. Time moves so fast. The moments… all of them… they come and then… they go.

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You see, my boy graduated high school this weekend, along with many others… including the other fantastic seniors we celebrate today.

And this weekend wasn’t just Matthew’s graduation. This weekend was also his senior prom. Two lifelong memory-making events… two hugely significant *moments* amid an exciting time of transition and potential that is unfolding all around him. It’s been a big, wonderful weekend.

But there’s another moment I’ve long gone back to in my head across the years. If I close my eyes I’m there. It’s early September, 2009, in the cafeteria of Perry L. Drew Elementary School in East Windsor, NJ. I’m sitting with Matthew and Melissa at one of the lunch tables in the middle of the room filled with other kindergartners and their parents. The school staff is leading us through kindergarten orientation.

I was excited and nervous for Matthew—the first day of school is a big, big day. But that was also the day I realized… we had only 12 more first days of school for Matthew until college. Just 12 years until he’s off for college.

And that realization hit me like a ton of bricks, and jumpstarted in me this deep, visceral desire to slow the Spirit down. A deep, visceral desire to slow the Spirit’s insistence of just moving on from one moment to the next.

**Put plainly… I wanted to put the Spirit in a headlock.** I didn’t know how… and I never did figure it out. But I desperately… desperately wanted to headlock the Spirit in order to control the future. Or at least the pace at which it comes.

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Of course, we’re here this weekend because, thank God, I could do no such thing. For as much as I sometimes don’t want to see it, God knows what God’s doing so much more than I do.

While I’d be lying if I didn’t admit there’s a tinge of grief amid such significant transition in our family—as significant transitions always entail some element of grief—mostly… mostly… I’m just overflowing with love and pride for my boy. Mostly I’m overflowing with gratitude and amazement amid the past 18 years of amazing moments we’ve been blessed to share.

Just as I know every parent of high school and college graduates are proud and grateful of their kids, and all the moments they’ve been so blessed to share.

Just as I’m also overflowing with pride and joy at what God is doing with Abby and Jasen.

Just as I’m overflowing with wonder and amazement at what God is doing in and through Towson Presbyterian Church.

I mean… if we just take a step back and look at some of the moments we’ve been blessed with this past programmatic year, TPC, the Spirit’s movement is evident all over the place:

* Joel returned from his sabbatical.
* We got to celebrate our first, in-person Homecoming in two years.
* In-person church school resumed with phenomenal students and leaders.
* A crew of phenomenal youth joined in ministry with a slate of inspiring youth advisors.
* Our incredible music ministry returned to in-person offerings!
* All gifts we give thanks for this day!

But that’s not all!

* The Spirit led us to give life to a **brand-new, virtual campus** of Towson Presbyterian Church, to spread God’s kingdom in ways and places we’ve never done before.
* We confronted the pandemic with a new HVAC system in the sanctuary to gather… even as the pandemic continues its ebb and flow.
* We installed a state-of-the-art audio and video system to help us live into this new two-campus era of TPC’s life.
* We created three new Mission Action Teams that have already created remarkably meaningful moments of mission and outreach.
* We welcomed a wonderful slate of new members this spring.
* Our spiritual formation offerings grew to unforeseen levels as more of us are making time to engage in moments of devotion and practice and exploration.
* Our stewardship this past year witnessed new levels amid incredible generosity, as more and more found moments of generosity leading to deeper joy.

And that’s not all. That’s so far from all.

But all of it—all that’s named and not named—each and every moment of ministry… each new mission endeavored… each new moment of grace shared… love given… peace sought… has helped usher us one step closer to the realization of God’s kingdom around and within us.

So as much as I might want to headlock the Spirit… as much as I might selfishly want to put up roadblocks to new moments of formation and transformation… Pentecost reminds us what we, disciples, are truly called to do.

Live fully. Or perhaps, better said, **live faith-fully by pursuing each and every new moment of life for exactly what it is—Spirit-filled!**  Filled with the potential of all the Spirit makes possible.

So today, TPC, amid an incredibly festive day in which we celebrate our graduates… our church school leaders… our youth group advisors… our choir members and musicians… let us also rejoice and give thanks for where we are—individually and communally. Let us celebrate the gifts offered… the experiences shared… the lessons learned… the ministries endeavored… the love given and received… even as we recognize that where we are today is *not* where we’ll be tomorrow. The Spirit will make sure of that, as it keeps on, keeps on, keeps on leading us into what’s next.

We may not know what or where that will be… but we do know God will be in it. And that, dear friends, is always enough.

I love you, Matthew.

Amen.