

## **Pentecost, Whitsunday. June 4, 2017. Acts 2:1-21.**

Since Spring has more or less come now that we've gotten to early Summer, I've taken to propping the church doors open all Sunday morning. My hope here is to communicate to the neighborhood *and to us* that we are a community that is fundamentally open—open to others, to our neighbors, to the world. This past Sunday, it was vividly illustrated for me that this noble practice also leaves us open to other things. After the 10:30 service, while a few of us were still lingering among the pews a bird flew directly in through the doors and started an erratic circuit of the rafters.

At first this was delightful: an unexpected beauty crashing into our church. Something wild interrupting the calm and comfortable echoes of the predictable rhythm of our liturgy. I gasped in that joyful way that only something as quick and beautiful as a bird in flight can make us gasp. I understood again an old line of poetry that I only half-remembered but have since looked up: my heart in hiding stirred for a bird.

But after a couple of minutes . . . well, our unexpected guest was still here and it began to occur to us that if the bird didn't fly back out the door on its own, we would have to do something. The vestryperson who was on lockup duty began to realize that the routine checklist wasn't going to be much help. Indeed, the thing about something new happening is that our routines don't provide us with a ready-made response. This bird was exactly the same color as our ceiling and as it made itself comfortable, we started having a hard time finding it. So we're turning lights on and off, fidgeting with the fans, trying to reflect light back up to the ceiling. The fun began to fade as we realized that we didn't know how to get rid of this bird so that we could all go home.

But, this isn't your average church. This is St. Christopher's and we can handle a bird. So we improvised. We got a long pole that we usually use to change these high-flung light bulbs and taped a large poster board with financial reports from the annual meeting on it. We found the bird and, with all the windows open, began waving these financial charts at it, thinking that if anything would scare away something wild and free, it would be a church budget. It stayed put. So as a last resort, we offered it a spot on the vestry, sure that this would scare it away from the church forever.

Now, I think that the bird is gone. We left a window open all that day and when I came back that evening there was some evidence on the floor that the bird had been here, but I couldn't find any evidence that it was still in the church. So the bird is probably gone, but seminary taught me to recognize a good sermon illustration when I see one. It was probably just a coincidence that last Sunday we prayed for the Holy Spirit and a bird showed up. And it's probably a little facile to build half a sermon around it. But then again, it is perhaps a little foolish to spend our time praying for something and then to be certain that whatever happens afterwards is completely unrelated. Maybe this is part of what leading a faithful life is: staying open to God speaking to us through the mundane, through the annoying, through birds that are the color of the ceiling—miracles that bear a striking resemblance to the everyday.

So before I riff more directly on the text from Acts, here's what this bird reminded me of in relation to the Holy Spirit. First, if we open ourselves to the Spirit of God, the Spirit just might come. But, it may not come at exactly the time we want it to. In fact, the Spirit may well come at a time that is downright inconvenient to us. It messes up our schedules, changes our priorities, in general has very little regard for our best laid

plans. The movement of the Spirit may look at times pretty mundane—at times it is a bird in flight, wings gilded by the sun; and at times it is completely indistinguishable from a mud-colored ceiling. There is no guarantee that we will be able to cajole the Spirit into doing what we want. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and wild birds perch up on top of whatever liturgical furniture they want. And, finally, the Spirit isn't afraid to make a mess. I rather wish that the bird had not illustrated this point so vividly, and I'm sure that the messes the Spirit makes are more spiritually uplifting.

But the point is that the Holy Spirit is about doing something new, and the new is messy. In today's reading from Acts, many new things are happening. The small group of disciples who had spent much of the time since Easter either in hiding or going back to their old lives are transformed into the church on the march, fearlessly proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in the streets of Jerusalem. The streets are full of faithful pilgrims from all over the Mediterranean and all of them are hearing the proclamation in their own language, which is new on two fronts: spontaneous polyglotism is new, as is the notion that the gospel is directed at people from Egypt and Libya and Rome and wherever Phrygia is.

The Day of Pentecost is messy and new and exciting and it calls the disciples forward into proclaiming God's love to all people. And while this thrilling, exuberant response to the movement of God is still ongoing, Peter wastes no time pulling it back to more familiar ground. Notice the Spirit speaks to Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya, visitors from Rome, Cretans, and Arabs. Peter begins his sermon by addressing the "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem." It's still bold for a fisherman from the sticks up in Galilee, but compared to the list of peoples we started with, it's hard not to think that Peter is being rather unambitious.

And we, of course, are right there with him. We may not have tongues of fire dancing on our heads, but the Spirit has never stopped moving among us, beckoning us forward, calling us to carry the good news into places we wouldn't have dreamed of going, inviting us always onward to something new. It may not happen when we have it penciled in on our calendars. It may not always be spectacular. It may present us with problems we don't know how to address. It may make a mess of our expectations and categories. But the Spirit is always calling us past the boundaries that we have come to depend on and equipping us to go beyond those boundaries.

To what new thing might the Spirit be calling you? How is she equipping you to go? To what new thing might the Spirit be calling us, as a church? And what great gifts has God given us to help us do it?