

## **Pentecost B. May 20, 2018.**

There was a day this week when I woke up and saw the headlines and was just overwhelmed by how bad all the news was. And that day wasn't even Friday, when a child murdered ten people in a Texas high school. It makes for a strange context for today—the day that we are commissioned and empowered to proclaim the good news of God's work in Jesus Christ. That good news is most succinctly put in the terms of one of the prayers we say at the Eucharist: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. The Day of Pentecost is about the church being almost chased from its enclaves by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim this good news to all and sundry. And then finding, against all odds, that we have actually been made able to do it. It is normally a joyous, hectic day that celebrates God's disruption of even our pious routines.

And on this particular Pentecost, we have even more hectic joy because at Wiggle Worship we are baptizing Udo Davis Lee. And if you've never been to one, we don't do liturgies that are more hectic than a Wiggle Worship baptism. Today is an odd combination of worship tone and current context—if feels like we're singing showtunes while standing waist deep in a fetid swamp teeming with dangerous reptiles. So the challenge we face is how to embrace this exuberant mission of proclaiming the good news, even when all the news is bad. How can we, without faking it or being sinfully tone deaf, spill out from this our enclave with punchdrunk joy to join God's healing work in the world?

Here's the thing about the good news we have to tell: it doesn't for a moment deny the reality of the bad news. What it denies is the finality of the bad news. Earlier I mentioned those words from one of our communion prayers. The first article of “the mystery of faith” is “Christ has died.” And it was real and it counted and it was awful. Terrible things happen and they aren't always undone in our lifetime. Our hope never denies this. But the rest of that “mystery of faith” is that Christ is risen and Christ will come again. Which I think means that God's love cannot be quenched even by death, but is stronger than death and finally, will undo death.

The good news we have to tell has integrity because it takes death seriously. But the rest of the story tells of a God who is about drawing life out of death and silently, against all appearances, making the world new. It's about a God who looks out over a valley of dry bones and thinks, “I can work with this.” It's a story the world needs to hear because it is true. Good Episcopalians might quibble with some of the historical details, but what is true is that death is real and God's love is stronger than death. That God brings life even out of death, and that new life is coming and is sometimes here. The Holy Spirit is chasing the church out of its rooms because we have a story to tell that the world needs to hear. It is our story, the story that makes us who we are.

Pentecost sends us out to tell this story even though we're not particularly likely evangelists. We tell it as best we can. Sometimes with words, sometimes with actions, sometimes by just dogged determinedness to get up again and muster what patience and kindness we can. We tell it even though we too, of course, are weighed down with grief and distracted by anger and tempted by cynicism. We tell it with whatever courage we can muster because the story itself has made us into a people who tell it. And when we do, we tend to get into trouble.

After a week like this, what I want is for the Holy Spirit to be a comforter. And I'm sure that's fine and often that's how the Holy Spirit works. But the evidence from the book of Acts is that the Holy Spirit's preferred role is instigator—I won't quite say "troublemaker." We're about to leave the book of Acts for our Sunday readings but most of the rest of the book is the earliest Christians getting thrown out of synagogues, kicked out of town, arrested, hauled before religious and civil authorities, and spending quite a few nights in jail.

When the news is all bad news, we all need to be comforted, yes. And sometimes we're called to be the comforters. But also, the news isn't going to get much better unless some of us are willing to let the Holy Spirit get us in a little bit of trouble. I said that the world needs to hear the story we have to tell, but that doesn't mean that our rulers will be pleased by a people who are committed more strongly to love than to death. When we take meaningful stands for love among brothers and sisters who are addicted to the power of death, we might get in a little bit of trouble. It won't be entirely pleasant, but the trouble is where the Holy Spirit is likely to be headed. This is what we sign up for in the baptismal covenant, which we're about to renew. It's what Udo is signing up for in his baptism this morning: to be the people who tell honestly the good news of God's love even when it's hard, even when no one wants to hear it, even when it's likely to cause trouble. Amen.