

Texts: John 20:19-23, Acts 2:1-21

“When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.” And then it exploded, blew up into a million pieces; look at it today: the church is all over the place. Look at that Pentecost Day, by the end of the day: never together, in the same place, in the same way, ever again.

There is this splitting, multiplying, outward propulsion inherent in God’s great acts. God’s big events never have a finish time; they open time, reveal a brand new future. Day one launches a walk to forever. We, and all creation, are spun outward, onward, upward. From Abram and Sarai’s call to travel to a land of promise, to the slaves freed from Egypt, to the opening of a path through the Red Sea. Moving forward. Onward. Outward. Wider. Deeper. Longer. The new day never really ends; it pushes forward, even at the tomb.

It starts small, as we hear both our scriptures today. Contained, confined. Lacking animation, color, energy, purpose. The launch point: they were all contained in one place. On the Sunday evening of that amazing weekend, the disciples hid behind closed doors, for fear of the Jews. Invites the question for us: what keeps us all locked up, unanimated, not going anywhere? Stuck. Awaiting launch.

I wore my red tie today; red is the prescribed color for Pentecost. Some churches make a big thing about having worshipers wear red on Pentecost Sunday. I confess I get a bit judgy about that, wondering if the color we wear gives adequate expression to what Pentecost means, as churches tend to stay confined in a very same place, walled in, unanimated, not going anywhere, by choice. Stuck. Wearing red or not.

The Spirit, the ruah (in Hebrew), the pneuma (in Greek) entered, filled them, and transformed their stuckness, “the entire house where they were sitting”, on Pentecost. It was a sudden, explosive sound from heaven, a howling, pervasive wind. Who could ignore it, who could stay put, who could resist its push, its pull, the force? In that room, everyone found they were in a whole other place, a place they’d never been before, compelled to speak about the mighty acts of God, in their own language, and to be understood by the others – all voices heard, all persons valued, all contributions vital to the amazing mix of the moment. Blown outward. The church mobilized onward from Pentecost Day One. From Jerusalem in 30 AD even to the corner of Ajo Way and Bilbray in 2017 AD, as we mark our new day here. Compelled to dream of moving forward, being pushed outward, wider, deeper, longer, celebrating the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ.

We are no longer in the same place as last Sunday. Subject to the holy ruah, the pneuma, the Holy Spirit, as we are being swept up into God’s new day.

The forecast for Pentecost Day Two, here in this church of Jesus Christ, at the corner of Ajo and Bilbray, calls for songs, crafts, snacks, games, and stories for young ones.

More than that, I predict buzzing energy, and laughter, a higher degree of mess and chaos than usual, a higher degree of tiredness among the adults than usual, and celebrating the mighty acts of God. Day Two through Six carry the same forecast, here in this church. And we shall find ourselves pushed outward, onward, farther, and longer by the power of the Holy Spirit. All voices heard; all persons valued. We're still in Pentecost Day One.

I remember how my favorite teacher on John's Gospel, Dale Bruner, teaches this story from John 20. Jesus came to the disciples, on that Sunday evening, behind closed doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. He greeted them: "Peace be with you." Peace is "shalom" in Hebrew, meaning wholeness, completeness, complete wellness with all. Jesus opened the closed-up, anxious space to peace. Then he showed them his hands and his side. Jesus brought the gift of wellness, while bearing the exposed physical wounds that the world had inflicted. Wounded and fully alive, he came entered their isolated space of fear, having conquering life's most menacing fear of death. Bringing peace, while bearing mortal wounds on his body. Broken for you. Poured out for you. How did they react? John reports: they were absolutely ecstatic! They were not in the same place anymore! Fear to amazement!

He said again – "Peace be with you" – shalom, wellness, calm – along with the words – "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Not simply: go. Not just: "I am sending you". But: "you're just like me". Your going, your sending, onward, outward, is part of me, linked to the risen, conqueror of death, in spite of the whatever wounds the world inflicts. The broken will be whole. The locked up will be sent out. The fearful will become courageous. Death's door swings outward. It is still Day One.

Next, Dale Bruner, as he teaches the lesson, will take a breath spray, spray it in his mouth, and go up to each person in his classroom, and breathe out. "Receive the Holy Spirit." Like Adam when the Creator breathed the first breath into his nostrils. Day One. It is pure gift, from God; no strings attached. No qualifications, no rejections. Bruner writes the only way a disciple could have missed the gift of the Holy Spirit would be if he ducked out of the way when Jesus breathed on him. The dry bones come to life, the wind of God blows through the valley. Receive the Holy Spirit. Wider, farther, longer, deeper, it pushes and pulls us, all heard, all valued, all loved.

Within the Spirit, the breath, the risen Christ speaks forgiveness to the frightened and the broken. When did the church stop breathing that message and take to judging and discounting people according their sins? I heard a radio interview, with the rock and roll artist Tom Petty, and he talked, very candidly, about forgiveness being the most powerful gift one person can give to another. He said forgiveness means everything. Did we duck that one? Can we, the church, live and breathe the gift of forgiveness again? Visit people in their stuck places, open up those confined rooms of fear and guilt, offer peace to rattled nerves, compassion to broken souls, bring mortal wounds into life-giving resurrection light. How else can the church live and breathe? Tom composed a song titled: "I Forgive It All." Sounds to me like Day One.

It's the song that we've been sent to sing, with the breath we breathe in again: the holy ruah. It sends us to this table: where all are heard, all are valued, all are loved, and saved, by our risen Lord. Jesus forgives it all, for us all. The disciples were absolutely ecstatic; this is Pentecost Day One.