

Pentecost Sunday B  
Peace, Seattle  
May 24, 2015  
Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-21, John 15:26-27

## **THE SPIRIT'S PARADIGM**

**Sun bleached bones brought back to life.**

**Visions and dreams brought into being through the Spirit's midwifery.**

**The Spirit of truth appointed by God to be our Advocate and guide.**

**Three powerful texts with three powerful testimonies about what happens when God's Spirit is unleashed in the world; each answering the question: WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING? WHAT'S THE SPIRIT FOR?**

**These are questions we're called to LEAN INTO during the festival of Pentecost.**

According to strict chronology, the festival of Pentecost we celebrate today is the THIRD festival of Christian community. But in reality, Pentecost is the one with the deepest roots.

Based on the Jewish Festival of Weeks, Pentecost celebrated the first harvest of the fruits of the earth 50 days after Passover.

Without the Pentecost of Acts 2, there would be no telling of the Christmas story.

Without this Pentecost there would be no telling about the cross and the resurrection.

The fact that we celebrate Christ's birth among us, his journey to the cross and his resurrection by God's hand, is a tribute to what happened on one particular Pentecost which Luke describes so powerfully for us this morning:

- When the Spirit blew with such a force it shook Jesus' disciples to the very core, opening ears, loosing tongues, animating them with a bold willingness to proclaim the message that God was in Jesus laying a path for the reconciliation and healing of all things.

**On Pentecost a new paradigm was launched—**

- One in which women as well as men would participate.
- One in which young people as well as elders had a stake.
- One in which slaves would take their place alongside the free.

The Spirit that swept through Jerusalem that day didn't signal an incremental step in a new direction but a whole new world bent on answering the question:

**WHERE IS THE SPIRIT LEADING? WHAT IS THE SPIRIT FOR?**

**So, what is the Spirit for? In Ezekiel** the Spirit's job is clear: to breathe new life in to dry bones; to revive a bereft and hopeless community; to make them live again.

**In Acts** we see how the Spirit surprises the community—literally blowing away their assumptions about how God works in the world—and opens up a new vision for what it means to live as God's people.

**And in the gospel**, the Spirit is called the Advocate, the Spirit of truth who will guide us into all truth, the truth about Jesus, the truth about our identity as children of God, the truth that the abundant life Jesus gives is too good to keep to ourselves.

The Spirit calls us out of a posture of being curved in on ourselves and sets our vision outward, just as the Spirit called those fledgling Christians out of their homes and enclaves and into the streets.

**Where is the Spirit leading us? It's leading us OUT.**

**A new report this month by the PEW CENTER** shows that the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining while the share of those who don't identify with any organized religion is growing.<sup>1</sup> By 2050 the number of Christians in the United States is projected to decline from over three-quarters of the population to around two-thirds.<sup>2</sup>

**Worldwide, the religious profile is changing at an even faster pace.** Over the next four decades, Islam will grow faster than any other major religion. If current trends continue, by 2050 the number of Muslims will nearly equal the number of Christians around the world. And 4 out of every 10 Christians in the world will live in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup> Where is the Spirit blowing?

Some people seem convinced that the end of the church in this country is only a matter of time. But I believe that the world still has a deep hunger for meaning, for belonging, for the hope and liberation God offers us in Christ Jesus. When I see our congregation's commitment to reaching beyond ourselves I see evidence that the Spirit is alive and well at Peace.

We may not be able to do much to affect worldwide trends. But we can do something to affect the quality of life we share in this community and the way our neighbors experience what we're up to.

The question for us—on Pentecost, yes, but really every day—is, how do we who are planted here at 39<sup>th</sup> & Thistle, channel the Spirit's gifts so we become conduits for the love of God among the neighbors that surround us here? Indeed, how do we channel God's generosity in ways that make a difference?

**Some of you have heard about a new program sponsored by the city of Seattle and King County called RAINWISE.**

When the rains fall heavy in West Seattle and the drainage systems under our streets can't handle the volume, chemical-laden runoff and raw sewage gets flushed into Puget Sound. The RAINWISE program offers homeowners and businesses a way to help mitigate that trend.

Installing cisterns and rain gardens on our property would slow down this process by which the water from our roof drains to the street, thereby reducing the drainage volume that ends up in the sewer.

When the system works right, we contribute to the health of the Sound, we model our care for creation, we reduce our wastewater bill, and we gain a source of water that can be used for watering during the dry season. It's a win-win-win-win.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

Learning about Rainwise has gotten me asking about what other ways our congregation could take the natural resources the Spirit has pooled here—people, talent, generosity, commitment—and connect them with our neighborhood so they can transform lives for the good.

**I want to take a couple minutes right now and invite you to talk with the person next to you or with a cluster of folks around you, sharing your responses to two simple questions:**

- (1) What is the chief resource of our congregation?
- (2) How can we utilize that resource to connect our congregation to the neighbors that surround us?

We're not looking for one answer but many answers.

**There are index cards in your bulletin for you to jot down your thoughts, and when it comes to offering time, put them in the plate.**

**Two to three minutes, then, and I'll call you back. READY? GO.**

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There is an arch bridge in the San Gabriel Mountains that's come to be known as the "bridge to nowhere." Originally part of a new road being built in the 1930's to connect the San Gabriel Valley with Wrightwood, it stands now in the Sheep Mountain Wilderness as a vestige of a project that was never completed.

Floods took out portions of the new road as it was being constructed and the project was finally abandoned, leaving the bridge to stand by itself. It's a nice piece of engineering, but it doesn't connect.

It's not enough to identify what the chief resource of our congregation is; we have to make certain we utilize that resource to connect our congregation to the neighbors and neighborhoods that surround us.

Whether we're hosting Mary's Place families, supporting food banks, building raingardens, floating seal rafts, or going about God's work with our hands in other ways, the Spirit moves us ever outward and into the world.

The animating core of our mission begins right here, as we gather around God's Word, around Font and Table. But it never stops here; it never ends here, it never stays here. For the Spirit propels us ever outward, just as it propelled the disciple community out of their homes and into the streets.

For finally, that is what Pentecost is all about—God using us, individually and together, to make the love of Christ real in the lives of every person who intersects our own.

May God give us the will and the grace and the strength—and the SPIRIT—to do just that! Amen