



SERMONS THAT WORK

Day of Pentecost (C)

It's 9:00 Somewhere

**[RCL] Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21;
John 14:8-17, (25-27)**

Words fail. No matter how eloquent the person writing or speaking, words fail to convey human experience. From the emotions of a mother's first sight of a newborn healthy child to the feeling of being in a small boat during a storm at sea, we can sometimes capture something of an experience, without being able to capture the thing itself. Like the look of love in a dog's eyes, not everything can be put into words.

The Evangelist Luke finds himself at the limits of language as he writes of the Pentecost experience. He writes, "When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples 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."

The sound was like the rush of a violent wind. The tongues were as of fire. This is like when Luke wrote of Jesus' baptism, "[As he was] praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove." Not wind. Not fire. Not even a dove. But something like wind, fire, and a dove.

A television news reporter covering a tornado will often record someone describing the sound as the family huddled for safety as something like a freight train roaring by. Not a freight train. But something like that.

In fact, the Pentecost experience was a creative force sending that has rippled through space and time as the Holy Spirit has remained active in the world. Before that morning, the Jesus Movement was relatively small. The greatest preacher in the world sometimes had thousands on a hillside, but mostly walked and talked with a smaller travelling band of men and women so that they could all be in one place on that 50th day after Easter. By the end of the day, the sum total of Christ-followers would never fit in a single room again. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, calls Pentecost something like the Big Bang, as all Christianity radiates outward from this moment of creation.

The impact can be seen in the person of Peter. Fifty days earlier, he denied he even knew Jesus. In the time since, he first huddled out of fear, but then after Jesus' appearance and his ascension, he worshiped with others in the Temple in Jerusalem. The evidence is that he kept mum about Jesus. But after something like wind and fire, the timid disciples became bold evangelists and as they proclaimed the Good News of Jesus, people from around the world heard the Gospel in their own mother tongue. The Holy Spirit reversed the confusion of the Tower of Babel through the miracle of a group of largely unschooled Galileans preaching in perfect Egyptian, Parthian, and so on. The Holy Spirit serving as a unifying force to bring separate people together so each heard the same Good News in a way she or he could best understand.

Peter boldly shares the story of Jesus and tells the crowd, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

Luke concludes, "So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

That morning of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came with such power that words could not fully convey the experience, the first thought of those seeing and hearing the disciples was that they had been hitting cheap wine pretty hard. New wine is the cheap stuff, and these men and women were, after all, from Galilee. The crowd looked at the messengers and figured that with Galileans, the saying probably wasn't "It's 5:00 somewhere" as an excuse to start drinking. Instead, the saying must be, "It's 9:00 somewhere," perhaps coming out more as, "Lord knows with those guys, it's always 9:00 somewhere."

The crowd was on to something, however, in that the Holy Spirit is always ready to show up in a mighty way. When a friend calls you late one evening crying because her husband has left. Or when you go with your mom to that early morning appointment to get the biopsy results. Or when a co-worker learns his son has been in a car accident. Or when a child calls late at night from jail. In all the times and places when you need God to be present, recall, "It's 9:00 somewhere," and just as the Holy Spirit showed up one Pentecost when it was time to clock in for work, so God will not leave you comfortless. The Holy Spirit will come to you in all these times and places and so many more.

There are many kinds of pain and suffering and anguish in our world, but there is but one source of healing. And we who know the Great Physician Jesus Christ can offer that comfort and healing to others. Before the week is out and for many of you, before this day is over, you will run across someone fighting a great battle. And when you bump up against someone in need, remember this sermon and don't hold back. You don't have to get it right. Just trust the Holy Spirit to honor your good intentions. Share Jesus' love in ways small or big. God will handle the rest.

While the idea of asking God to use you in the week ahead might be frightening, know that you have done this before. You have gone for a walk or sat with a friend or co-worker in need. You may have shared a meal and offered a listening ear. Perhaps you have cut the grass for a neighbor who was sick. Each of us has been there for someone else before. The challenge here is to follow the Spirit's lead and then those occasions will be more frequent. While you might not have thought much about it, that doesn't mean it was not deeply significant for the person you were with. This is not something we do for God, but it is God's gift to us as we are there for someone else when they need it.

When and how might this happen? I have no idea. But I do know this, God came in a mighty way at 9:00 in the morning on that Pentecost, when the Christian Church was born – and it is always 9:00 somewhere. Whenever the Spirit nudges you, just lean in and trust God to be in the midst of the situation, for that creative force that changed the world at Pentecost is still blowing through our lives.

***The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue** is the Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia. He previously served on the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church and was the church planter for King of Peace Episcopal Church in Kingsland, Georgia.*