

Pentecost—Year B  
Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:25-35, 37  
Romans 8:22-27  
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Here we are *again*—sermon #11. I last preached after a mass shooting on **February 18<sup>th</sup>, the first Sunday of Lent, the Sunday after the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.** That sermon was just *four months after the shooting in Las Vegas.* And *today comes just three months after Parkland.* These mass shootings are coming faster and closer together. This time, our eyes are drawn to a rural community **not far from Houston—Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, TX—10 dead—nine students and one teacher—10 more wounded.** *One more community devastated; one more trauma in our national psyche.*

And it's **Pentecost.** *What are we to make of that?* Can this day and these scriptures speak anything to us that would help us to keep breathing, to have the courage to put one more foot in front of the other?

We can start with the fact that **the disciples were all together in one place,** much as *we are gathered together here,* and they surely were not expecting what came next. **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.** Sometimes, things come upon us with a **sound** that completely captures our attention—the **rush of a violent wind**—in the Greek, this **“rush”** also means **“to carry a burden,”** and this **violent wind comes with force.** **Word of these shootings** keeps rushing towards us with force carrying their heavy burden, *begging us to take notice.*

**Then, 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 **Spirit** is *not* shy about getting our attention, and though we may have tried to *domesticate* it and depict it as a *dove, not so today.* The **Spirit** is determined to **touch** us, to **burn** us, to **fill** us, and to **set our tongues free to speak with power.**

And here's the thing—**people were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the known world—different languages, different cultures, different perspectives and life experience.** People that *hated* each other, who were *enemies,* people who should *not have been near each other* were there. *Could we just start by noting that Jews and Arabs were there?* And it goes on from there.

But at **the rush of this sound that came bearing its burden with such violence and force, at the rush of this sound, this crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.** *Amazed* and astonished, they asked, **“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.”** All were *amazed* and perplexed, saying to one another, **“What does this mean?”** But others *sneered* and said, **“They are filled with new wine.”**

They *each* heard the disciples speaking to about God's deeds of power in their *own native language*, in the language that *they could understand*. And some people were **amazed** by this, and some people **sneered** at the possibility—that's just a 1<sup>st</sup> century way of saying that *they were totally cynical*—and those *sneering* folks **dismissed** those *risking to speak a different language by smearing their reputation and saying they were drunk*.

But **Peter** stood firm. “We’re not drunk—it’s only 9AM!” And he went on to tell them *exactly* what was going on, **riffing on Joel’s prophecy**.

**“In the last days it will be, God declares,  
I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.  
And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”**

Preach it, **Peter!** Sons and daughters with voices set free. The **visions of the young**. The **old who haven't lost their capacity to dream**. It *doesn't matter* your **station**, or your **status**, or your **education**, or your **position**, or your **class**, or your **race**—the **Spirit's gonna use everybody!** Even **creation herself** is going to lend her voice to the chorus, and it's *not going to be all unicorns and rainbows*, but we're talking **blood** and **fire** and **smoky mist** and **sun that goes dark** and **blood moons**. But in the end, **those willing to join this chorus will know** in the depth of their beings **what it means to be made whole**.

And this is *whole Spirit thing is so often in the realm of what-is-yet-to-be-revealed*. **Jesus talks about this with his disciples** in his last conversation with them.

**Jesus says, “But if I go, I will send the Advocate to you...I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”** Jesus is *still teaching*; Jesus is *still speaking*; Jesus is *still declaring*. There are so many things that Jesus has to say to us, but sometimes, we can't *bear them until we can bear them*. But this **Spirit**, she **comes**, and she **guides into all the truth, if we will but have ears and hearts and minds to listen**.

And we *won't always know what to do or how to pray*, but **Paul** reminds us that it's *never* been all up to us—just like with we saw in **Joel's prophecy** that **Peter** quotes, **creation is groaning with us, in labor, trying to give birth to a new way of being in this world**. And Paul continues: **Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words**. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. *We don't have to know how to pray, the Spirit is already praying and interceding from the center of our being in sighs too deep for words*.

So, the Spirit is *coming upon us with violence and force and urgency, carrying its burden*; the Spirit is *setting us on fire with a word to speak that might be foreign to us but will be the very thing someone completely different than ourselves needs to hear*; the Spirit is *praying within us in language beyond words, the language of sighs*; and the Spirit is *revealing to us the things we need to hear that we could not bear to hear until this precise moment*. Wow, that's a lot!

So, back to the **shooting**, and **guns**, and **gun violence**. Commentator **David Brooks** noted Friday that *not much happens after these mass shootings because the whole conversation around guns has become a proxy for the larger culture wars*. We know this *broken record* with *rural folk in flyover country feeling like east coast urban elites are dismissive of their way of life and the values they hold dear and are just trying to tell them how to live their lives* AND those *east coast elites feeling like rural folk are backwards and unenlightened*.

And we know, we know that *it's so much more complicated than this*. There are *wise people of good will* in the middle of this country, and there are *wise people of good will* in the cities and on the coasts—and there are people from sea-to-shining-sea *who want this mass carnage to stop!*

**What if we took this Pentecost moment seriously?** What if we *believed* the Spirit was **touching us with fire and setting our tongues free to speak, not in the language we understand, but in the language the other understands?** It is *no longer acceptable* to say “*it's not about guns*” because it *is* about guns. And it's *no longer acceptable* to say that *gun control will fix everything* because *gun control won't fix everything*—gun control won't fix the *alienation and desperation* that so many people, particularly young men, are feeling. It's *no longer acceptable* to say that this is just **a mental health issue** because the *vast, vast majority of people who suffer with mental illness are not violent*. But it is *also not acceptable* to **ignore the mental health issues that are going unaddressed across this nation that can lash out with lethality**.

What if “*enlightened elites*” could learn to speak the language of traditional family values that hold life so very dear AND understand the preciousness of life and relationships that stands at the heart of *that culture*? What if “*rural folk*” could learn to speak the language of human rights and human dignity AND understand the preciousness of life and relationships that stands at the heart of *that culture*? What if rural folk and urban elite and gun owners and those who can't conceive of owning a gun *could all gather in this Pentecost moment* and *hear the other whom they most fear speaking to them in their native language that they could understand?* *Could you imagine such a thing? Can we dare to think what might be possible then?*

As a person who believes in **the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ** and **the power of the Spirit**, I *refuse* to believe that this cycle of insanity *can't* be stopped. **IT CAN, if we will allow the Spirit to speak through us in ways that we can't yet imagine, revealing to us truths that we have not yet grasped.** And believe me, **these truths will be hard truths to bear and something is going to have to die in each of us to be able to hear them.**

So much work is ahead of us, and in the **St. Luke's community**, we are trying to tackle it concretely. **To speak in the power of the Spirit AND to hear with the ears of the Spirit demands that we really work on how we speak and how we listen.** We are asking the **Supper Groups** to meet **two** more times with the intent of **experimenting** with actually trying to **talk about a "hot issue,"** and the **"hot issue"** we have chosen is **"guns."**

The *first* month, we will be learning about **what happens to us when something punches our buttons or gets under our skin.** We have to **understand how our brains go reptilian** if we are to have any success in crossing these great divides in our culture.

The *second* month, we will use our *Practices for Talking About Things That Matter* to guide a conversation where we each *share stories about our experience with and/or our feelings about guns and understand how these experiences impact how we see issues regarding guns.* The *Family Group* has already had this conversation, and there was surprise *at the variety of experiences* around the circle. It was noted that there was some *nervousness* prior to the conversation, but that it *really* did go okay. *We are all afraid to talk across the lines* on this, but *we have to learn the skills to speak the truth we've been given AND to hear the truth the other holds.*

For those not in *Supper Groups*, we will *teach those skills on a Sunday morning between services* and have *the chance to share our stories on a following Sunday.* **Scared as we are, we must begin and let the Spirit move us out of our comfort zones,** if we are to **grasp the bigger truth yearning to be revealed** that has been *eluding* us and that is *bigger than any of us can imagine.*

I want to close with a poem by **Naomi Shihab Nye**, but you need the backstory. When I can't sleep at night, I listen to **Krista Tippett's podcast *On Being*** which has interviews with artists and musicians and writers and spiritual thinkers. It's a whole lot better than listening to news shows. This week, I caught her interview with **the poet, Naomi Shihab Nye.** *Naomi grew up between Ferguson, Missouri, Ramallah, and Jerusalem—her father was Palestinian and her mother American. She insists that language must be a way out of cycles of animosity. She'd have us notice "petite discoveries" that embolden us to choose human nourishment over division. Her poem "Kindness" has traveled the world,* but that's for a sermon on another day.

At the end of the interview, **Naomi** told a story about **Paul Robeson.** **Paul Robeson** was *an American bass baritone concert artist; he was African American—he recorded *Steal Away* and *Were You There*; he was also an activist.* I'll let **Naomi's voice** take it from there.

*“Cross That Line” is an important poem to me, because I loved Paul Robeson so much as a child. I loved his voice. We had a record of him singing. And I wouldn't read his biography until I was an adult and know about what he suffered as a so-called communist and how his passport was taken away from him and he was not allowed to leave the nation, though he had a huge fan club in Europe and elsewhere. So I thought this was so funny when he did this. And I now own a CD of this concert.*

**“Cross That Line”**

*Paul Robeson stood  
on the northern border  
of the USA  
and sang into Canada  
where a vast audience  
sat on folding chairs  
waiting to hear him.  
He sang into Canada.  
His voice left the USA  
when his body was  
not allowed to cross that line.  
Remind us again,  
brave friend.  
What countries may we  
sing into?  
What lines should we all  
be crossing?  
What songs travel toward us  
from far away  
to deepen our days?*

**It's Pentecost. The Spirit touches us with its fire and gives us the ability to speak in languages that, though unfamiliar to us, the other is so longing to hear. What countries may we sing into? What lines should we all be crossing? What songs travel toward us from far away to deepen our days?**

**Lord, in your mercy, help us all to “cross that line.” Amen.**

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