



Will you Dance?

June 9th, 2019

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta

Rev. Dr. Simon Mainwaring

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The Collect

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The First Reading *Acts 16:9-15*

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.



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Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the 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? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- 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."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that 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.' "

Gospel *John 14:8-17*

Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that



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I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

*'Every child has known God,
Not the God of names,
Not the God of don'ts...
But the God who knows only four words.
And keeps repeating them, saying:
"Come Dance with Me, come dance."'*

Words of the Persian poet, Hafiz, offering an encouragement that we might draw closer to a God who is on the move, toward a Pentecost God, to be sure. Words that invite us into the kind of intimacy that only dancers know, a closeness with their own bodies and with one another, a proximity that has the capacity to settle fire on our heads and place strange new words of life upon our lips.



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Pentecost, the feast we mark today that celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit, beckons us toward a certain dynamism in our life of faith. It ushers us to get up from our fixed locations and our fixed notions of what life is all about, and to move beyond ourselves toward God and toward the Godness we might discover in one another. It is a moment of the Spirit breaking in that promises to become the feast of our spiritual awakening, in what theologian Elizabeth Johnson calls the discovery of each other's beauty persistent in our fidelity to one another in the Spirit.

In a way, then, as dancers from far-flung corners of the world bring the gift of dancing into our midst this morning, we might be inclined to think of Pentecost as an invitation to picture ourselves as dancers. Consider this morning as an opportunity for progress, if you like. Bear witness to the dances of our kin, from Midtown to Clarkston, and then dance for yourself, not necessarily with great rhythm nor in perfect lock-step, but moving as the Church does when it moves together best: as one Body of all sorts of bodies, from all kinds of angles yet tending toward one another.



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Dance offers an imperfect, yet, I think helpful description of the life of the Church: a people choreographed in God's Spirit, individuals with all of our peculiarities and personal preferences, drawn close enough one to another to become a body; oriented toward one another enough to be able to see the gift of God in the life of the other.

Yet, it takes time, doesn't it, for you and I to learn to recognize the unique outline of the Spirit traceable in the life of another human being. Just ask anyone who has been married for any length of time. They are likely both to laugh and to cry at how grace-filled and how utterly strenuous that endeavor can be. Similarly, in baptism, as we proclaim the dignity of every human being in general, we proclaim a dignity that we are called to discover in each particular person in all of their unique and remarkable detail. And in our Eucharistic meal, it is the broken body made whole, the dead risen again, and the irrefutable endurance of love that draws us in, over and over into gospel lives of mutuality that can only become truly mutual when our life with others is given the time it needs to mature.



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What does all of this have to say to us? It says that the pentecostal church needs time to come into being, so let us be patient in bearing one another. Such has been the lesson of one of the great living saints of our time, Fr. Gregory Boyle, who for the past 30 years has run the world's largest and easily most successful gang intervention ministry, in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. If you haven't had the chance to learn about Fr. Boyle and his work in founding Homeboy and Homegirl Industries, I highly recommend his book 'Tattoos on the Heart'. For Boyle, daily life, proximate with former gang members, allows him to see the in-dwelling of the Spirit in what might otherwise pass as unlikely human places, in what he calls *'the holiness of second chances'*. For him, community is *'the singular place where patience and steadiness can be practiced, compassion be expanded, and gratitude be nurtured'*, *'the setting where we are able to calibrate our hearts and point them in the direction of the welcoming embrace'*.



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For recovering gang members, such mutuality creates a safe space for those who live with trauma sufficient enough to be able to share a life together in the hope of healing and grace. Yet, as the communities in Boyle Heights have discovered, to serve others is one thing; yet the promise of mutuality can only be fulfilled if we attend to our own wounds too. Many of you will know through our ministries here among those who have been displaced, or impoverished, or left without a home, or lost to addiction and despair, that if we only come to serve others, with arms outstretched bearing what we have to make another life better, then we will remain at arms length from others. Just as in Christ it is the wounded healer who offers us healing, to truly meet another we will have to admit where our own pain lies. For when we are able find God in our wounds, the possibility of healing among the lives of others becomes real.



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In many ways, then, the gifting of the Holy Spirit is the gifting of the capacity we all need to see what it is we carry within that holds us back from full relationship with the world. Boyle tells the story of a former gang member, Jose. When Jose was nine, his mother drove him 60 miles into Baja, CA to an orphanage and said as they came to the door, *'I found this kid on the side of the street, would you take him in'*. It took 90 days for his grandmother to find him there and bring him back home. Every day of his life in elementary school his mother would beat him, with things you could imagine and with things you could not. Every day his back was bloody and scarred, because of which he wore three t-shirts to school, no matter the weather: because only with the third would the blood on his back not show. Jose wore three t-shirts well into his adult years because he was ashamed of his wounds.



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Yet, through the power of a vulnerable kind of proximity, through the building of mutual relationship with others who also are wounded, Jose has been able to see the marks he carries in another light. He says, *"In the past I didn't want anyone to see them, but now, now I welcome my wounds. I run my fingers over my scars. My wounds are my friends. After all, how can I help heal the wounded if I don't welcome my own wounds."*

What is it holds you back from full relationship with the world, I wonder? Where are you in need of healing? Which space of vulnerable proximity is the Spirit inviting you to enter?



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We don't have to be carrying the wounds of a traumatic childhood or gang life to become aware of our own need for healing. For it was not the events of the day of Pentecost that truly enabled the apostles of Jesus to go out and become Christ's hands and feet in the world, it was what they discovered about themselves in their struggles with the world after that point. As we follow the story deeper into the Acts of the Apostles we see that the maturity of Peter and Stephen and James emerges over time, as they learn to see God through the eyes of the deeper and more spacious compassion that comes with a transformed heart. They are able to be Christ's agents of healing as they themselves are healed.

How might Pentecost become the Spirit-filled jolt in the arm for our own Christian lives that teaches us the power of kinship in Christ, to awaken us, in Boyle's words, *'from the dream of separateness'*, trusting that the *'measure of our compassion does not lie in our service of others but in our kinship with them'*.



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Perhaps all we should hope for is to learn more how to love. For love makes movers even of the most inert of us in the end. So, on this dancing Sunday, this feast of God's outrageously freeing Holy Spirit, I invite you to dance for the sake of love, dear saints of God. Dance with your bodies, with your lives, with your hearts, celebrating the kinship we find in one another because of this community. Dance to express your need to learn different rhythms lest you be enslaved to the one that beats in your head alone. Dance as a reminder that community requires us to make room for others. Dance, because the Spirit is the blazing glory of a love set free, roaming wild, with no sense of discernment, or distinction, just given away joyfully and always capable of healing our wounds and transforming our lives. Dance as if your life depended on it, for joy, for hope, for justice, for the Spirit who is here today, and who has come to set us free.

*'Every child has known God,
Not the God of names,
Not the God of don'ts,
But the God who knows only four words.
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