

John 15: 26-27; 16: 4-15

WE HAVE COME TO THIS SPACE, DEAREST LORD, WHERE THERE IS HEALING AND HOPE, WIND AND FIRE. WE HAVE GATHERED AS A COMMUNITY SEEKING THE GIFT OF YOUR SPIRIT. OPEN OUR EARS, OUR EYES, OUR HEARTS TO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED. AMEN.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS WHEN YOU'RE DRIVING IN THE CAR, LISTENING TO THE RADIO...MAYBE IT'S AN INDEPTH STORY OR PODCAST OR A POST-GAME INTERVIEW WITH A COACH AND YOU BECOME SO ENGROSSED IN THE STORY THAT EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR DESTINATION, YOU CAN'T LEAVE THE CAR UNTIL YOU'VE HEARD THE WHOLE STORY? SOME PEOPLE CALL THESE "DRIVEWAY" MOMENTS—STORIES SO COMPELLING AND MOVING THAT THEY TOUCH MIND AND HEART. A PASTOR WRITES OF A DRIVEWAY MOMENT HE HAD WHILE LISTENING TO THE SHOW *TAPESTRY*. *TAPESTRY* IS A RADIO SHOW IN CANADA AND FEATURES DOCUMENTARY AND INTERVIEW PROGRAMMING RELATED TO SPIRITUALITY, FAITH, AND RELIGION.

THE PROGRAM'S HOST WAS INTERVIEWING FORMER CHEF, SECULAR INTELLECTUAL, SKEPTIC, AND JOURNALIST SARA MILES, ABOUT HER UNEXPECTED CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY WHEN SHE ENTERED A CHURCH ON IMPULSE ON SUNDAY.

YOU SEE, MILES WAS RAISED AS AN ATHEIST AND SHE WAS HAPPILY LIVING AN "ENTHUSIASTICALLY SECULAR LIFE" AS A RESTAURANT COOK AND JOURNALIST, INDIFFERENT TO RELIGION AT BEST. AS SHE SAYS IN THE PROLOGUE TO HER BOOK, *TAKE THIS BREAD*, "I WAS CERTAINLY NOT INTERESTED IN BECOMING A CHRISTIAN...OR AS I THOUGHT OF IT RATHER LESS POLITELY, A RELIGIOUS NUT."

BUT AS SHE ENTERED THE DOORS OF ST. GREGORY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH ON A WHIM, SHE ATE A PIECE OF BREAD AND TOOK A SIP OF WINE AND FOUND HERSELF *RADICALLY TRANSFORMED*...AT THE AGE OF 46 THIS WAS HER FIRST COMMUNION AND IT CHANGED EVERYTHING...LITERALLY EVERYTHING IN HER LIFE.

I SHARE THIS STORY WITH YOU BECAUSE TODAY IS PENTECOST SUNDAY...THE DAY WE FOCUS ON BIBLICAL STORIES IN WHICH GOD'S SPIRIT...GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US...ENCOUNTERS ORDINARY HUMANS AND WONDERFUL AND UNEXPECTED THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN.

PENTECOST IS, IN A SENSE, THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH; BUT IT WAS AN IMPORTANT JEWISH FESTIVAL BEFORE IT BECAME A CHRISTIAN FESTIVAL. IT WAS ONE OF THREE PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS THAT WERE IDEALLY SPENT IN JERUSALEM AND IT OCCURRED FIFTY DAYS AFTER PASSOVER—WHICH WAS THE CELEBRATION OF ISRAEL'S LIBERATION FROM EGYPT. IT RECALLED, NOT ONLY THE GIVING OF THE COVENANT TO ISRAEL AT MT. SINAI, BUT

ALSO THE CREATION OF A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY---A RADICALLY DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING *AFTER* EGYPT. AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS INCORPORATED THESE THEMES INTO THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF PENTECOST AS WELL.

ON PENTECOST WE CELEBRATE THAT THE SPIRIT PROMISED BY JESUS IS NOW PRESENT AMONG HIS FOLLOWERS AND IN THE WORLD. THE SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST. THE STORY OF PENTECOST IS INFUSED WITH MIRACULOUS ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM. THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH RECEIVES THE AUTHORITY TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF THE RISEN LORD. EVEN PETER, THE DISCIPLE WHO PUBLICLY DENIED CHRIST, BECOMES A BOLD PREACHER. THE GOSPEL IS INTENDED FOR EVERYONE; REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS ARE OFFERED TO ALL WHO CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

PENTECOST IS THE CREATIOIN OF A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY IN THE CHURCH. AND A ONCE TIMID, FRIGHTENED, AND DISCOURAGED GROUP OF JESUS’S FOLLOWERS—HIS DISCIPLES—BECOME FORCEFUL, CONFIDENT, AND UNIFIED ADVOCATES FOR THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE RISEN CHRIST, AND A NEW FAITH MOVEMENT—AND COMMUNITY—IS BORN.

BUT THE CHURCH HAS NOT ALWAYS LIVED UP TO THIS HIGH CALLING. SOME CHRISTIANS HAVE FALLEN PREY TO ‘COSMETIC PIETY’ INTENDING TO LOOK GOOD ON THE SURFACE, BUT LACKING IN ANY REAL DEPTH OR COMPLEXITY. COSMETIC PIETY EASILY THROWS PEOPLE INTO A CHANGLESS-LIFELESS FAITH...A GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS. THIS RESONATES WITH THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET EXEKIEL, WHO SAID: “PROPHECY TO THESE BONES, AND SAY TO THEM: O DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD...I WILL CAUSE BREATH TO ENTER YOU, AND YOU SHALL LIVE...AND YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM LORD.”

THE BONES FOR EZEKIEL ARE THE SYMBOLIC BONES OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILES WHO HAVE LITTLE HOPE OF BREATHING LIFE BACK INTO THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL. BUT THE IMPLICATION IS THAT GOD *CAN*...GOD’S SPIRIT, BREATH, WIND---CAN PUT FLESH ON A SKELETON AND CALL IT LIFE---WHETHER IT’S A NATION OR A CHURCH.

AND THAT’S REALLY REALLY GOOD NEWS! AND THAT WAS THE UNEXPECTED EXPERIENCE OF SARA MILES, THE ENTHUSIASTIC ATHEIST, WHO HAD NO INTENTION OF BECOMING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS, UNTIL SHE MET HIM, AS A LIVING REALITY, IN THE BREAD AND WINE OF COMMUNION.

HOW DID THIS ENCOUNTER OF THE SPIRIT CHANGE HER LIFE? SHE STARTED A FOOD PANTRY AND GAVE AWAY LITERALLY TONS OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES AND CEREAL AROUND THE SAME SMALL ALTAR WHERE SHE FIRST RECEIVED COMMUNION. SHE THEN ORGANIZED FOOD PANTRIES ALL OVER THE CITY OF SAN FRANSICO TO PROVIDE HUNDREDS OF HUNGRY

FAMILIES WITH FREE GROCERIES EACH WEEK. WITHOUT COMMITTEES OR MEETINGS, AN OFFICE OR EVEN AN OFFICIAL PHONE NUMBER, SHE RECRUITED SCORES OF VOLUNTEERS AND RAISED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS.

THE LIVING SPIRIT OF CHRIST, DESCRIBED IN SCRIPTURE BY THE UNPREDICTABLE, UNCONTROLLABLE SYMBOLS OF WIND, FIRE, AND BREATH, RADICALLY TRANSFORMED SARA MILE'S LIFE—AND HER COMMUNITY. WHEN THE SPIRIT IS ACTIVE AND PRESENT, IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT "ME" BUT ABOUT, "WE." IT'S ABOUT THE CREATION OF A NEW KIND OF WELCOMING COMMUNITY BASED ON THE SPIRIT'S LOVE.

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I RECENTLY EXPERIENCED SUCH A COMMUNITY WHILE WORSHIPPING AT ST. DYSMIS IN THE STATE PENITENTIARY. THE SPIRIT WAS MOVING AND BREATHING IN THAT WORSHIP SPACE AND I WITNESSED THE INMATES NOT AS "OTHER" BUT AS FELLOW UNIFIED ADVOCATES AND BELIEVERS IN THE RISEN CHRIST. IN HIS SERMON, PASTOR JEFF ASKED HOW HE KNEW THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS REAL AND ALIVE. HE KNEW THE SPIRIT WAS REAL BECAUSE HE SAW IT IN EACH PERSON THERE.....EACH PERSON WORSHIPPING JESUS....GIVING UP THEIR REC TIME. PASTOR JEFF ASKED IF I WOULD HELP IN SERVING HOLY COMMUNION AND THAT EXPERIENCE

GOD'S SPIRIT IS ALIVE AND ACTIVE AND BRINGING RENEWAL AND REVITALIZATION TO INDIVIDUALS WHOSE BONES HAVE GONE DRY. WHETHER THOSE DRY BONES BELONG TO PEOPLE WHOSE FAITH HAS BECOME ROTE AND ROUTINE, TO INMATES WHOSE FAITH DRIED UP WITH NO HOPE.

TODAY WE ARE THE DISCIPLES FROM THE PENTECOST STORY. THE QUESTION IS: WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? MANY HAVE SPENT YEARS GATHERING IN THIS CHURCH HEARING THE STORY OF FAITH OVER AND OVER AGAIN. THE MAJORITY OF US MIGHT NOT EVEN REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME WE HEARD THE STORY OF PENTECOST. SUNDAY SCHOOL? VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL? A SERMON? IT WOULD BE EASY TO COME ON THIS DAY WITH NO EXPECTATIONS...JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY.

YET, THE PROMISE OF JESUS TO THOSE GATHERED IN THAT UPPER ROOM IS OUR PROMISE TOO. WE, TOO, HAVE WALKED WITH JESUS, HAVE HEARD THE STORIES OF JESUS, AND HAVE CHOSEN TO FOLLOW IN THE WAY OF JESUS. WE, TOO, HAVE HEARD THE PROMISE THAT GOD'S SPIRIT WILL BE OUTPOURED AND WE MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED IT, IN A CHILD BEING BAPTIZED, IN THE GATHERING AROUND THE COMMUNION RAILING. THE SPIRIT HAS BEEN CALLED FORTH AND SHOWN UP, BUT HAVE WE PERCEIVED IT?

TODAY, I INVITE YOU TO PAY ATTENTION! CAN YOU HEAR THE SPIRIT'S ROAR? AS YOU ENTER A NEW WEEK, LOOK AROUND! WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHERE IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD SHOWING UP? HOW IS GOD BREAKING INTO THE PLACES WHERE YOU LIVE, WORK AND PLAY?

AFTER ALL, WE ARE THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS. THE ONES WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO FOLLOW IN THE WAY. THE ONES WHO PRAY AGAIN AND AGAIN, ASKING FOR THE SPIRIT TO COME, TO BE OUTPOURED ON US GATHERED TOGETHER. THE ONES WHO WAIT EXPECTANTLY IN THIS PLACE OF WORSHIP TO BE EMPOWERED FROM ON HIGH, SO THAT THE MISSION OF JESUS CAN CONTINUE THROUGH US.

THERE'S A SWEET, SWEET SPIRIT IN THIS PLACE, AND I KNOW THAT IT'S THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD; THERE ARE SWEET EXPRESSIONS ON EACH FACE, AND I KNOW THEY FEEL THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. SWEET, HOLY SPIRIT, SWEET HEAVENLY DOVE, STAY RIGHT HERE WITH US, FILLING US WITH YOUR LOVE; AND FOR THOSE BLESSINGS WE LIFT OUR HEARTS IN PRAISE; WITHOUT A DOUBT WE'LL KNOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN REVIVED WHEN WE SHALL LEAVE THIS PLACE.