

The Last Day
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ ¹³But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “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.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

I watched a lot of television when I was growing up. One of the shows was *Gimme a Break!*, with Nell Carter. I doubt I could tell you about any episode but one, the one with the earthquake. Nell finds herself trapped in a library after an earthquake with only a deaf, Spanish-speaking woman. After much frustration trying to communicate with one another, Nell notices that the woman has pulled out a rosary to pray. “Hey, we got something in common,” she says, as she touches the cross she wears around her neck. “We both pray.”¹ Nell begins talking about singing in the church as a child, rapidly and in English, when the woman stops her because she sees Nell say “Ave Maria” and asks her to sing it. Then, as Nell sings, the woman signs along.

I wonder if that “aha” connection those two actors demonstrated so memorably more than thirty years ago wasn’t but a glimpse into the scene in Jerusalem. All these different travelers suddenly discovered a connection, and to the good news of Jesus Christ. I’ve had the good fortune to travel to places whose native languages are not English and I can tell you, after hours of hearing only another land’s language, how sweet it is to hear another English-speaker out of the blue. I wrote in my note for the newsletter about Pentecost and referenced the moment of violent wind and divided tongues being one of chaos for the disciples. Hearing only unfamiliar languages can feel like chaos to the brain, which can’t find its footing.

In that chaos of rushing wind and tongues like flames for the disciples, before they could even think, God stepped in and took charge, dividing **their** tongues from their native language, native tongue, into the languages, tongues, of all who had traveled to Jerusalem. I said in the newsletter, “I wonder what it might look like...to enter into the chaos welcoming

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbdGLAqg7r0>

God's charge of things" and I confessed that "God's plans are often an afterthought for me amidst chaos." But look what God brought out of that chaos - the disciples spread the word, which started the church, and millennia later it persists, continuing to thrive in the world beyond the confines of North America and Europe.

Just because the wind hasn't blown open our windows this morning doesn't mean God is any less in charge in our own chaos. Sometimes we're keenly aware that life is uncontrollable; other times we're lulled into thinking we have some measure of control. The truth is that only God has the power to control and only God is able to bring life and form from the watery chaos, as we first read God did at the beginning of creation. It takes a lifetime of practice for us to remember this with consistency - that God is in charge. I continued in the newsletter asking how we might get into practice remembering this and explained that, as a visual person, my thoughts go to the Pentecost color of red. It is because of this that I have put out the basket of red things and invited you to choose something from it. Let whatever you chose, or have yet to choose, be a visual reminder for you that God **is** in charge, just as God was at the Pentecost gathering we read about in the book of Acts.

If you're not a visual person, maybe it's language that can serve as your reminder - perhaps to have written somewhere, or even memorized, Psalm 46:10, which reminds us "Be still, and know that I am God!" Or maybe it is a kinesthetic reminder which would help you - perhaps slowing to breathe in deeply or bringing your hands together in a gesture of prayer. I encourage you to find what suits you so that you can become practiced at remembering who is in charge when you can't find your footing. Or maybe you already have found something. Maybe it's the bread and cup we'll soon take from the table the Lord has prepared for us. Or maybe it's as elemental as the water of which Christ speaks of in our reading from John.

You may have noticed that both of our readings come from festival times in the Jewish calendar. Pentecost was Jewish before we coopted it - a celebration fifty days after Passover, called the Festival of Weeks, and it celebrated the end of the spring harvest and remembered the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. In John Jesus was in Jerusalem for the

Festival of Booths. Minister Meda A.A. Stamper explains, “Originally a harvest festival, it came to be associated with the eschatological [or end times] hope for a time when God would flow out in rivers from the temple, like water from the rock in the wilderness. Celebration of the festival included ceremonies involving water and light...”² Harvest and God giving. The law on the very stone of the earth and water. Jesus says “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” Even with our own water woes in Waukesha, we in the United States take water for granted in ways other nations do not and the lack of water in those places is the root of so much uncertainty. Again, God is offering certainty for those who lack it.

When I chose the title for this conversation starter as I was planning in March, I was struck by the repeated use of the words “last day” in both readings. Peter talks about “In the last days” and our reading from John opens with “On the last day of the festival.” I think, now, I might have called this *God in the Chaos* instead. In the youth group with which I began the clearer journey to ministry, one of the students when I began, one who sought adventure to the chagrin of the adults who were charged with his safety and that of all the others, was fond of the phrase “Embrace the Chaos.” Boy, did we dislike that phrase as adults. We were certain that our primary purpose was to reduce, or even eliminate chaos, so we certainly didn’t plan on embracing it, especially not those of us who believed they could control everything (me).

While there needs to be a large measure of control when shepherding dozens of teenagers, these seventeen years later I realize he may have been an accidental (on purpose?) theologian. While his seventeen-year-old self³ might have been looking for a way to relax rules or even just loosen up the adults, what he suggested then actually opens us up to God being in charge and not us. Of course, God wouldn’t be calling his family from the emergency room when he broke his arm/leg/[insert body part here], but God **would** have been there. So maybe, if you’re feeling daring, not only do you pick up something red to

² *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3*, p. 21.

³ He is now a forest fire firefighter, motorcycle-rider-from-the-US-to-Nicaragua, Kilimanjaro-climber, among much else.

remind you God is in charge but maybe you remember, too, to embrace the chaos. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Almighty God, open our minds and hearts to recognize and welcome you in the chaos, we pray. Amen.