



May 28th, 2023

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

“Becoming”

For those of you who I haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet, I am Pastor Jennifer Hope-Tringali, and I thank you all for the warm welcome my family has experienced this weekend. For the last five years, I have been living mostly in Guatemala, serving our church as the Executive Director for Tree 4 Hope, a 501(c)(3) focused on providing long-term hope to children and their families in Guatemala.

Living in Guatemala has provided my family with many unique experiences, not the least of which is looking out at the horizon from our backyard and seeing Volcan de Fuego, an active volcano. Our home is 11 miles from Volcan de Fuego, which is far enough for us to be outside the realm of danger, but close enough to see puffs of smoke and even lava gently flowing out of its crater.

But if I am honest with you, the stress of living that close to an active volcano comes more from an unexpected volcanic side effect....el polvo....the dust. Volcanic dust is dark in color and super fine, permeating everything. You wake up in the morning, and there it is covering the patio tiles. You sweep it, leave for the day, and come back to more volcano dust. The house feels continually dusty. You reach for a shirt in the closet that has been sitting on a shelf for a while....volcano dust shakes off of it. You open up the cover on the piano....volcano dust covers the keys. It somehow gets inside of the house, even with the doors closed, and into everything, simply using the air to travel and permeate into every nook and cranny.....kind of like the Holy Spirit!

This Pentecost morning we had the opportunity to hear two different stories about the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus' disciples. These stories are so interesting to look at side-by-side, as they offer two very different experiences and contexts. In the story from Acts that we heard and that you participated in so beautifully, we heard that Jesus' disciples were all gathered together in one location when this loud, roaring breath rushes in and fills the house. The Greek word used for the way this wind “fills” has more of the nuance of “filled to the brim,” as in filling completely, permeating like that volcanic dust, while also fulfilling or accomplishing God's divine action.

Unlike volcanic dust, you cannot sweep away the Holy Spirit. And, volcanic ash, though it can be annoyingly pervasive in one's home, in and of itself is wonderfully rich. As it weathers, it releases nutrients like magnesium and potassium, producing an extremely fertile soil for growing vegetables, coffee, fruits, and macadamia nuts.

We see the Holy Spirit's fertility springing forth in Jesus' disciples as tongues of fire settling on each of the disciples, giving them the immediate ability to speak a new language. Is there anybody out there who has learned a new language or begun the process of learning a new language? Learning a new language with the goal of becoming conversational if not somewhat fluent requires a lot of time and effort and intention, doesn't it? In this story, it is as if the Holy Spirit becomes an embedded Google Translate App in these disciples' brains. Having now spent twenty years learning Spanish and still not being able to speak perfectly, I admit, this makes me a bit jealous.

As these Galilean disciples of Jesus were speaking a cacophony of languages spewing forth God's mighty deeds, they attracted a crowd of people from a long list of locations. Looking at a first century map reveals one significance of this extensive list of regions is that they are from the west, the north, the east, the south, the northwest, the southwest, the northeast, the southeast....in other words, from every direction.

This crowd of people were amazed, marveling, astounded, because all of these languages being spoken were spoken by Galileans who would probably never have had access to these languages. We hear that these disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and this time, the Greek word for "filled" is different, meaning more of a prolonged continuously renewing supply, like that daily ongoing deposit of volcano dust.

This particular Pentecost story from Acts occurs in mid-morning and is very public with a lot of excitement that we might even describe as chaos, involving violent wind, a loud roaring noise, and a crowd of people all talking at once in different languages.

In the story we heard from the gospel of John, we see a very different context. Jesus' disciples are gathered together inside of a room with a locked door, fearful of their future. Their close friend, teacher, and mentor has just been brutally murdered as if he were a criminal by hanging on a cross. Were they next? They certainly weren't wandering around outside proclaiming loudly in many languages the mighty deeds that God had accomplished through Jesus. In this story, it is evening, darkness has come, both literally and figuratively, and the disciples have isolated themselves seeking solidarity and safety with each other. This is a quiet, intimate space shared by a small group of friends. They were still in a state of mourning, of sadness, of uncertainty as to what might happen next.

I can't help but reflect on this gospel reading in light of a particular past service here at CTK.....Pentecost 2021, when Pastor Duane Larson was preparing to leave. I watched that service and if I am honest with you, I will admit to you that I wept. I was watching a group of disciples, gathered in an intimate space together, in a state of mourning, sadness, and uncertainty as to what might happen next. I could sense the loss and grief, but also the movement of the Holy Spirit who was tethering everyone together in an interwoven tapestry of comfort and care,

empowering each person for a future yet to come. In particular, the Holy Spirit had already been preparing someone who was welcomed into membership at CTK that very same day to become your interim pastor. Pastor Mandy Derr, a bright light that God shined into the transition that followed.

In our gospel reading from John, despite the locked door, Jesus enters the disciples' space, the light shining into the darkness, the source of abundant life. He brings them peace, and he breathes into them the living breath, the Holy Spirit. As Jesus breathes into his disciples, he ushers in a new way of life, a new beginning, a new journey is starting.....they are in the process of "becoming."

And the disciples would go on to do great works, which are only possible because God's Spirit is inside of them, empowering them, equipping them to be sent. Jesus' divine mission continues through his disciples, creating a counter cultural community that participates with God to bring justice and peace to all the world.

In March, when I was visiting CTK, it was important for me to have some quiet prayer and discernment time in this sanctuary, to be physically in this space and feel God's presence and your presence. I knelt and prayed for a while, and then I explored the space, pausing to admire the beauty of the stained glass windows, to read the words at the top of this magnificent Bach organ, and finally to stand and gaze into the baptismal font. As I looked down into the font, I noticed symbols at the bottom. IC XC NI KA. Have you noticed those letters at the bottom?

These letters (IC XC NI KA) in Greek mean Jesus Christ Conquers, as in Jesus Christ conquered, is currently conquering and will continue always to be conquering death and sin. We remember this each time we have a baptism like today, each time we affirm our faith, and each time we dip our hand into that font and make the sign of the cross on our body. Luther describes baptism as a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit. This bath gushes over you and I abundantly, urging us on to a constant state of becoming what God is calling us into both individually and as a community.

Your three-year strategic plan adopted about this time last year begins with the strategic theme of "Becoming a Spiritual Home." I think that this is also a great theme for today's Pentecost readings. Both the community of disciples described in Acts and also those in John's gospel are communities being called forward, just as you and I are, to become a spiritual home with an outward focus of bringing healing and wholeness throughout the world. To be a healing place, a sacred space of transformation, a beacon of light, freed by grace to participate with God as vessels of justice and peace in all the world.

The Holy Spirit filled those disciples we heard about today in our Acts and gospel readings. And the Holy Spirit continues to fill up Jesus' disciples sitting right here today, because, in Pastor Larson's words, "Divine Love never quits." (Pause for reflection.)

Did you know that this font of yours can be tricky, maybe even mischievous? When I was reading those letters, pondering their meaning, I apparently was leaning on the font and when I finally backed away, I found myself to be soaked....an unexpected affirmation of baptism of sorts. That Holy Spirit, she was up to something!

The Holy Spirit permeates our space like volcano dust,
soaks our bodies like this overflowing baptismal font,
making us holy,
continually equipping and empowering us
to become what God is desiring for you and I
and our communities both local and global
to be the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace.

¡Come Holy Spirit,
Helig Ande, Pyha Henki, Heiliger Geist, Agio Pneuma, Espíritu Santo!

Thanks be to You, Triune God! Amen!!