

TEXT: Acts 2:1-21
THEME: The Spirit disrupts
SUBJECT: Bewilderment
TITLE: Bewildered

Pentecost Sunday
09 June 2019
Messiah Moravian
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The sound, like the rush of a *violent* wind, gathers a crowd. Pentecost is not a gentle, refreshing, cool summer breeze. Pentecost is not Trade winds off the ocean, leaving the taste of salt in our mouth and goose bumps on our arms. Pentecost is a *violent* wind like that of a tornado or hurricane.

The crowd gathers at the sound of a violent wind. This turbulence, this breath of God, disrupts life as we know it. Bewildered, the crowd cannot make sense of its experience. They are perplexed, confused, very puzzled. Bewilderment is an invitation to reconsider what we think we know.

Just as a great wind swept over the abyss at the beginning of time, creating order out of chaos, making the conditions for life possible, so now a violent wind sweeps over the disciples creating the conditions for new life. The word “wind” in both stories may be translated Spirit. The Spirit of God creates life, creates the conditions for the flourishing of life.

The old order dies hard. A violent wind is necessary to clear the landscape of our minds. Pentecost creates vertigo. Our normal reference points no longer serve to orient us. We are thrown into uncertainty and this uncertainty makes us uneasy.

The easiest thing to do, if we are wed to the old ways, to the old orders, is to follow the lead of the crowd: discredit and dismiss the cause of our bewilderment. These folk are drunk! They are filled with too much wine.

Peter offers an alternative interpretation: We are not filled with too much wine; it is only 9:00 am. We are filled with the Holy Spirit.

How do you know the difference between being filled with too much wine and being filled with the Holy Spirit? St Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the 4th century gives us a clue: Too much wine makes us forget what was known. The Holy Spirit makes us know what was not known.

The Holy Spirit makes us know what was not known! At the heart of the Christian experience lies an ongoing revelation of what was not known, of what makes for the flourishing of human life. At the very genesis of the church lies an uncontrollable force, like that of a violent wind, that clears away anything that restricts the freedom of human beings from fulfilling their destiny, from becoming the glory of God.

The church was created for, the church exists to promote, the flourishing of human beings. The comprehensive goal of the people of God is Shalom. The best English translation of Shalom, according to Nicholas Wolterstorff, is not “peace” but “flourishing.” The reason for being of the church is the flourishing of all human relationships: with God, with our fellow human beings and their creations, with the natural world, with oneself.

Anything that impairs human flourishing is unjust. This means the flourishing of all peoples, not just of white males in the USA. If I insist on maintaining the orders that permit my flourishing while hindering the flourishing of others, especially others different from me, I am guilty of impeding the work of the Holy Spirit.

The attempts to create the conditions in which all may flourish has us bewildered. We don't know what to make of our experience. The old reference points no longer orient us. We can discredit and dismiss the causes of our bewilderment, but if we do we shall know only chaos and death.

If, however, we experience our bewilderment as an invitation to reconsider what we think we know, if we allow our bewilderment to draw us into a larger, brighter vision of human flourishing, we might find our way to new reference points, recalibrating our compass towards the fuller realization of the glory of God. This is the promise of Pentecost.