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Acts 2:1-21

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The disciples were not together waiting in the upper room in Jerusalem by accident. They were there because Jesus commanded them before his ascension to go there and wait. Wait for the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that 40 days after Easter, Jesus went to heaven. And then they had to wait for ten days before the Holy Spirit arrived. I wonder what that ten-day period was like for them. If they were Presbyterians, they would have formed a committee, elected officers, written a mission statement, created a budget, and taken minutes. Probably they would have argued a bit too.

The odds were stacked against this small band of working-class disciples who were supposed to spread the gospel in a Roman occupied country. The likelihood of them starting a worldwide movement seemed low. They knew they were waiting for the Holy Spirit, who would come in power, the one who was sent so they would not be alone. They probably didn't realize that without the Spirit their work would fail, the movement would die out, the faith would not spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the rest of the world. The Holy Spirit was the secret ingredient. The Holy Spirit was the one who gave them the ability to see visions and dream dreams. On Pentecost, the church was born. It was incredible. With a few committed people and the Holy Spirit, something incredible came to be and changed the world – they had the faith, but the Spirit brought the power.

I read about a 4th grade classroom in Colorado where the teacher was finishing up a lesson on C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The teacher brought in a big empty refrigerator box and decorated it to look like a wardrobe. Early one morning, she brought in the wardrobe and put it in an empty classroom just off the school's library. When her students arrived, and they finished their last lesson she told them that she had a surprise for them. "I'm going to take you to the Land of Narnia." She led them out of the classroom, through the library, and into that room, empty of anything except that box. The kids came in, a few at a time, and walked through the wardrobe and their imaginations took over. Before long, they were lost in play, acting as characters from the story. They became fawns and centaurs, dwarves and talking animals. Pretty soon the noises became animated and loud. The librarian, not knowing about the game, came stop to the ruckus. She yelled, "I wanted it quiet! Just where do you think you are?" She wanted the answer, "A library." But one little girl poked her head up and said, "We're in Narnia!"

"And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...they shall see visions, and dream dreams." Children can still do this – they believe the world around them can be transformed - transformed for the better. They can build things. They can create things. They can fix things. They can imagine things. But do we still believe this? Would any of us even venture into a wardrobe if given the chance? The Holy Spirit is still alive working through men and women, young and old and I'd like for us to believe it. Really believe that miraculous, life changing, world changing transformations can still happen today. Sometimes it is hard with everything that is going on in the world right now to believe it.

The incredible amount of gun violence in the last few weeks is this horrible, awful, disgusting reminder of the brokenness of society. It is hard to cope with the continuation of these tragedies. I am really frustrated with our country that this land of wealth and opportunity allows innocent people to be murdered while going to school or to church or to a funeral or a grocery store or a movie theatre or anywhere. Round and around we go with the debate and seemingly it never gets any better and very little changes. It is stupid. It is stupid and maddening and somehow it makes me think that we don't really believe things can get any better. As Christians, maybe it makes us think that the Holy Spirit has decided to leave us to our own devices and has returned to the heavenly homestead. I hear a refrain from so many of you of about being deflated, despondent, and disheartened and I can understand it. But as Christians, we must not let those be our ultimate responses.

When Jesus told the disciples to wait in that upper room – he knew they had work to do. They were going to be sent out from that room, commissioned with callings to serve, and equipped with power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were going to have to really believe that they could do remarkable things, or their fears and frustrations would overwhelm them. The Holy Spirit came to that upper room and gave them the courage and the imagination to believe they could change the world.

I would honestly love to lock the members of this church into upper rooms – twelve people per room, twelve educated, passionate, affluent, well connected people in a room to come up with a plan and then leave that room ready to create the kingdom of God more fully right now. You can't leave the room until you are ready to work. One room would come up with the plan to give out gun safes to every family in America with kids living in the home. One room would come up with the idea to start a gun buyback plan offering cash to hand over firearms. One room would come up with a mental health program for middle schools and high schools. One room would come up with a way to advocate for better education in poor communities. Each room would dream dreams and see visions about how to make this world better and then they would do it.

Pentecost tells us we can do it. Not alone. But with others and with God's living, moving, powerful Spirit in our midst. Shootings are now the leading cause of death in children – homicides, suicides, and accidental shootings. This is a violation against God's creation. Every single life lost by a gun – is an affront to our Christian beliefs.

I was at Princeton Seminary for board meetings, and I was speaking with a fellow trustee who runs a church of over 60,000 members in South Korea. We were swapping COVID stories, and he was telling me that his church has 70% of its membership back in person and more people viewing online each Sunday to account for an increase in total membership. He said that giving has increased since before the pandemic and that they are more involved in outreach than before. I told him that was not our situation here and asked how he did it.

He said, "Well things weren't going well, and people weren't coming back or staying involved and were holding back on their giving. And so, I had to yell at them and tell them they were being lazy." "And that worked?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "because they knew it was true." I told him that he inspired me to yell at you.

So today on Pentecost, I want to tell you that we can longer baptize children and promise to raise them in the faith, if we are not also actively working to make this world more kingdom-like for them. We need to stop being so lazy and so downbeat and start believing in the Holy Spirit and in in our call to discipleship. As Peter Gnomes used to say, “Don’t ask, what would Jesus do?” Ask, “What would Jesus have ME do?” What would Jesus have US do with the power of the Holy Spirit?

Get in a room together ladies and gentlemen and start doing something. I believe you can do it and as it turns out so did Jesus. He believed the disciples could change the world. And so, they did.

Happy Pentecost – happy birthday to the church – happy commissioning day to the disciples!

Amen.