

Did you hear that? **Acts 2:1-21**

Whether you know it or not - Ben has to ask my permission before telling a story from the pulpit about me. Technically I have to ask his permission before I tell one on him - but the rule is not made for my storytelling style - it is made for his. Ben believes that one should never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Or Marty's more generous interpretation of that idiom is not letting the facts get in the way of the truth. This of course makes Ben a fabulous storyteller. Funny, engaging. And typically you understand very clearly the truth he is trying to tell you - whether you believe all his facts or not. Especially "facts" about me.

Luke is preaching

You may have noticed that the scripture we all helped to read this morning is also a bit fuzzy on the facts. The details, when closely examined, don't make perfect sense. The disciples - those who had witnessed the resurrected Jesus and then last week his ascension - are still hiding out. Gathered together in an upper room, not quite sure what to do next. And then when stuff starts happening, the descriptions are not quite clear - it's not that wind blew through the room or fire came down - but something like wind and something like fire was there. And all of a sudden we aren't in the room anymore because a crowd has gathered - and so everyone is outside but it's not clear how we got there. There's this list of people - every people group in the known world - but how could he possibly know where everyone was from? The details are fuzzy - but the truth is not. You see Luke is not trying to give us a history lesson - Luke is preaching a sermon. He's telling a story meant to inspire and change us. Luke is much more interested in communicating that something big happened - than he is with getting every detail just right. Something amazing has occurred - something life changing - something unlike anything he has ever known - something that shakes this group and draws a crowd - and impacts absolutely everyone.

Holy Spirit

There's a meme circling around Facebook that makes me chuckle- it says: The Holy Spirit doesn't just make you speak in tongues and dance - she can also make you shut up, say you're sorry, and examine yourself. I confess I don't always think of Spirit like that. In all of the fuzzy details of Luke's storytelling, I know that I have often missed - or at times limited the Spirit's work. Even in this familiar story - sometimes it's the speaking that gets a lot of my attention- I think I have even preached a sermon on how the Spirit helps us speak in ways that those around us can understand - so we should follow the Spirit into new ways of speaking or being. I still think there's truth in that but as I have read this scripture in the last few weeks - the miracle doesn't seem to be in the speaking - it seems to be in the hearing. In the listening.

Luke is really clear that people from all over the known world are there - he wants us to know that so much that he lists people groups starting in the east and traveling west across the whole world. Imagine how many different kinds of people are there. Not just how many languages - but how many perspectives and experiences and cultures. And all of that is gathered in and people listened to one another. Not just listened to argue or prove a

point or win the day but listened to understand. That seems pretty miraculous to me. And very, very beautiful. A diverse group of perspectives truly listening to one another - as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Wow...

Peter

In the face of all of that is unfolding - I can really sympathize with Peter. The task of the preacher is to look around at the moment - at the current situation - and say something true - something meaningful about this big thing that is happening - and to do that in conversation with the sacred texts and meaningful traditions that have come before. Peter has always been the impulsive one - and we love him for it - but even in this moment it's possible he didn't want the burden of speaking - that the hearing and listening was meaningful for him as well. But he steps into his role and his calling and does the best that he can. Last week's sermon noted that the disciples were probably a bit freaked that Jesus was passing the work of the gospel onto them - and this week's story shows them beginning to take ownership of the mission.

Drawing on the prophet Joel, Peter proclaims a message that firmly roots the manifestation of the work of God within the wide diversity of human kind. This is not a vision where power is held within a small like-minded group. No - the young cast vision, the old dream dreams. Prophetic thoughts are not limited by gender or economic status. Even those who are enslaved, trapped, looked down upon - have value and a way to lead. The Spirit is poured out on everyone...on every single one.

This decentralization is harder - it's more chaotic. It'd be easier if someone just told everyone else exactly what to do. It'd be easier if Peter had just given us all the rules and guidelines. It would be easier if the early church had just figured it out and we could just do what they did - because it is a lot harder to be *figuring* it out than it is to *have* it all figured out.

But that's not what this story gives us. It's not what the Spirit gives us. In this vision from Joel and then from Peter - we have to take responsibility - we have to participate and partner in the unfolding work of God. Systems with decentralized power require more responsibility from participants. It's how they work. Each and every individual has a role to play - each and every one of us. But none of us do it alone. This is a story of a community. Of a people. This is our story. Even when we are fuzzy on the details - amazing things happen.

The Spirit is poured out all around us and we are invited to build church together. It's a vision and a story for all of us - that needs all of us to engage and participate. It needs us to dream a new world into being. A world where - through the power of the Holy Spirit - we can be an incredibly diverse group of people who truly and deeply listen to one another - listen in order to understand. And become more fully alive because of it. May it be so. Amen