

Holy Chaos, Holy Comfort  
 Acts 2:1-21  
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 Farmville Baptist  
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Last week was Ascension Sunday and we talked about how the disciples' vision was too small ó how they were still hoping that Jesus would return them to the good old days of the Kingdom of Israel, but how God had much bigger plans in mind. Today, on Pentecost, we get the first real glimpse of what the new Kingdom of God will look like when the Holy Spirit falls upon the disciples in dramatic fashion. I imagine that years after the events in Acts, if we asked a disciple, "Where were you the day the Holy Spirit arrived?" they could tell you instantly. Why? Because these events change our lives, they become important mile markers in our life journeys. And these life changing events can create both chaos and comfort, anxiety and joy.

We can all relate to this: we welcome a child into our home ófor mom's, the discomfort of pregnancy is over, but this new bundle of joy throws our lives into total chaos. We experience great joy when we graduate or get married, but these joyous events are usually paired with some anxiety about what lies ahead. As happy as we are that the pandemic is ending, we have the chaos and uncertainty of what the church ó what all of lives - will look like in this unknown time.

So it was with the disciples. As we talked about last week, Jesus had left the disciples, ascending into heaven right before their very eyes, leaving them in a time of transition ó anxiety and chaos - yet again. But wisely, the disciples followed Jesus' instructions, they returned together to Jerusalem, actively praying and waiting in the upper room for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And then suddenly it happened ó literally out of the blue ó the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Often, we associate the Holy Spirit with a dove. In John 14:26, one way to translate the word that describes the Holy Spirit is Comforter. But the day of Pentecost is anything but gentle and comforting. Luke tells us that there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind that filled the entire room and divided tongues like fire fell upon them. It was chaos, not calmness, that first Pentecost morning, and there was no escaping it.

We have talked before that in Scripture the words wind and breath and spirit have often been interchangeable. Genesis 1 begins, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind or the spirit of God swept over the waters. God was at work, even then, creating order out of the chaos. In Genesis 2, we read that God created man, forming him out of the dust of the earth but he was lifeless until God breathed life or spirit into him, and he became a living being. Psalm 33 says it this way, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. When God breathes the spirit, everything changes, when God breathes the spirit, it can bring both holy chaos and holy comfort.

In Ezekiel we see God breathing life into the skeletons of the dry bones, and a nation that felt hopeless and abandoned was reborn. Holy comfort. The Holy Spirit came upon a young girl named Mary - holy chaos and holy comfort. The same happened when Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist received a visit from an angel and he prophesied about the coming of the Lord and holy chaos and holy comfort. Through the guidance of the Spirit, Simeon and Anna received holy comfort when they recognized and blessed the infant Jesus when Joseph and Mary presented him in the temple. Throughout the gospels, we read of the Spirit being at work through the ministry of Jesus, and He certainly brought both holy comfort and holy chaos.

This spirit that we see throughout scripture is this same Spirit who rushed into the upper room that Pentecost morning -- but something was different this time. For you see, in the past, these revelations of God were reserved for a select few; but on this day, the Spirit fell upon them all.

Everyone, (not just the leaders, not just the men, not just the most educated ó but every one of them) was filled with the Holy Spirit ó and holy chaos reigned. All of a sudden, everyone in the room began to speak in different languages, languages that were not their own. This would be like any one of us being able to speak Spanish even though we never took it in high school or college.

And then what happened? The wind of the spirit drove the disciples out of the upper room, out of their sanctuary, and into the street where they were compelled to share the story of Jesus and the kingdom of God. It wasn't long before a crowd gathered and the debate began. Some were cynical, Even though it was only 9:00 in the morning they sneered, "They're just drunken Galileans." Some were just bewildered. Others were amazed when they heard the disciples speaking to them in their indigenous languages. Holy chaos.

What a beautiful way for God to remind the disciples and the crowd that the Spirit was indeed for every nation, not just the Jews. That chaotic gift changed everything. Since everyone heard the message about God's mighty deeds and power in their own language, there could be no "lost in translation" that morning. The crowd understood the words, but they were also perplexed, "What does this mean," they cried?

What happens next gives me great hope. Who answers the questions from the crowds? Who dispels the fake news that the disciples are drunk? Who stands up boldly and interprets the prophet Joel and the words of King David? Who preached such a rousing sermon that 3,000 are

added to the church that day? It is Peter. The same Peter that had denied Jesus 3 times and fled in shame into the night. The same Peter that Jesus redeemed on the beach in Galilee that morning. The same Peter that goes on to become one of the great leaders in the early church. Friends, that is holy comfort ó not only for those gathered, but for all of us gathered here today.

You see, all of us who have placed our faith and trust in Christ ó all of us ó are recipients of this chaotic and comforting gift. We too have been given new life and hope by the Spirit, by the breath of God. As Hildegard of Bingen put it, “We are all sparks of the divine flame.”

One of our seminary students put it this way in an essay: “How exciting and life giving to know that I am part of God’s story that started with creation, continued with the life of Christ, the formation of the church, the writing of the New Testament, the spread of Christianity, and the struggles of sinners and saints throughout history to this day. The story is still being written. This fact gives me comfort and confidence to face the future. The world is a complicated, messy place, as it has always been and, until God restores the world to the way it was created to be, we will struggle. But in the struggle, God is at work.”

And so it is in this place this morning.

In some places both inside and outside these walls, like when one of our family of faith needs care or through FACES, the CLASP program or Farmville cares, we work to bring comfort. But in other places, both inside and outside these walls, we will experience some chaos ó as we learn to live into the next chapter in our story. The good news this morning is that in the midst of the chaos, our basic mission and message have not changed, it is only our methods ó how we go about our mission that we need to figure out anew.

The watch industry is a great example of not keeping up with the how. If you asked people in the 1960s which nation would dominate the world in watch making during the 1990s

and into the twenty-first century the answer would have been uniform: Switzerland. Why? Because Switzerland had dominated the world of watch making for the previous sixty years. The Swiss made the best watches in the world and were committed to constant refinement of their expertise. It was the Swiss who brought the world the minute hand and the second hand. They led the world in discovering better ways to manufacture the gears, hearings, and mainsprings of watches. They even led the way in waterproofing techniques and self-winding models. By 1968, the Swiss made 65 percent of all watches sold in the world and laid claim to as much as 90 percent of the profits.

By 1980, however, they had laid off thousands of watch-makers and controlled less than 10 percent of the world market. Their profit domination dropped to less than 20 percent. Between 1979 and 1981, fifty thousand of the sixty-two thousand Swiss watchmakers lost their jobs. Why? The Swiss had refused to consider a new development—the Quartz movement—ironically, invented by a Swiss. Because it had no main-spring or knob, it was rejected. It was too much of a paradigm shift for them to embrace. Seiko, on the other hand, accepted it and, along with a few other companies, became the leader in the watch industry.

The lesson of the Swiss watchmakers is profound. A past that was so secure, so profitable, so dominant was destroyed by an unwillingness to consider the future. It was more than not being able to make predictions—it was an inability to re-think their methods. Past success had blinded them to the importance of seeing the implications of the changing world and to admit that past accomplishment was no guarantee of future success.<sup>1</sup> Of course since then, we've had the rise of smart phones and smart watches that have revolutionized the industry once again. (PAUSE)

Dear friends, whatever this next chapter brings ó with all of the holy comfort and holy chaos it will hold, remember that God is in our midst. Just as with the disciples on that first Pentecost Sunday, God is surrounding us, empowering us, and calling us out of our comfort zones and into new things. Will we have to learn how to do things differently? Absolutely. But hold fast to the fact that we are a part of God's continuing story, and that God will walk with us each step of the way as the Spirit sends outside of these walls and into the streets with the Good news. I don't know about you, but I can't wait to hear and see how that story continues to unfold here. So this morning we say, Come Holy Spirit come. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> James Emery White, Rethinking The Church, Baker Books, 1998, p. 20.