

Pentecost Sunday

WELCOME

*Good Morning! Grace and Peace from United Protestant Church in Morgan Park, Duluth, Minnesota, where the air is crisp and clear and the flowers are starting to bloom.*

*Where some of us were up late, following the difficult news in our community and country.*

*We name it today. We claim it as our own. We lift it up to the light and love of God.*

*So come in, come in, this moment. Let us still our minds and open our hearts and welcome God's presence.*

HYMN

SCRIPTURE

*It is Pentecost Sunday, friends. Hear these words from the Acts of the Apostles.*

**Acts 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 and your young men shall see visions,  
 and your old men shall dream dreams.  
 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
 and they shall prophesy.  
 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
 and signs on the earth below,  
 blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
 and the moon to blood,  
 before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

HYMN  
 SERMON:

Friends, there are times in church life when our hearts and minds are occupied by something that feels bigger than what we are accustomed to on a Sunday...bigger than our tradition, or ritual, or habit.

And there times in a Pastor's life where the usual exegesis and message on the Gospel feel luke-warm, at best. And then I read a fellow pastor's notes and see these words to colleagues: "This is no time for fence-riding, lukewarm, tip-toeing leaders." And am reminded of the words of Deitrich Bonhoeffer: "One should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." (paraphrased)

So I make a shift on this Pentecost Sunday, with a clear understanding that everything happening in our country is not separate or peripheral from our Sunday worship, and indeed it is not separate or peripheral to our faith. In fact, worrying and fretful times are precisely when we live into our faith.

Brian Doyle once wrote: "The story of our lives is grace under duress."

What has risen up in our lives right now (and I say "risen up" because this is nothing new, this is just being brought out of the shadows and into the light) matters to us. Matters this morning as we pray together. Matters as we hold God's presence close in our discernment as a Christian community.

So... I tried to write a commentary about it, on Friday. A commentary about race, division, and judgment...from the context of my experience. Friends, I've been given the gift of education, and I lift up that time shared in racism dialogue groups, my engagement in prayer and faith, my role in being lifted up from the people (as is our tradition) as a spiritual and faith leader. Again: "This is no time for fence-riding, lukewarm, tip-toeing leaders."

I have thought, and prayed and written and explained page upon page. When I went to send share it in the Friday commentary, it was four pages long. You don't need that. Don't deserve that. Because this is not a time for me to be showing off an exercise in what I know... this is a time to share my heart... God's rhythm in my heart.

So that's what I wrote, and I want to share it:

It was a line from the Acts of the Apostles that jumped off the page to me this week. Chapter 2, verse 8. *And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?* Acts 2:8 – I build off of that.

*Can't we all just get along?*

That's what I hear, over and over in church and community conversations when we talk about race.

*I mean, why are "they" so messed up?*

"They" (in quotations), referring to "the other", be it the white supremacist, the angry black man, the meth-head in that blighted apartment, the single mother whose children's behavior bothers us, the guy that doesn't give a damn about anybody but himself, the girl that manipulates men to get what she needs, the... .. Whew.

Here's the deal: we *can* get along. But in order to do that, we have to recognize and honor the true humanity of those we describe as "the other." Ok, that's "Pastor-speak" isn't it—so let me put it another way: every one of those angry people that bother us are, no matter what we think of them, are deeply loved by God.

Repeat: each selfish or rude or [pick your own adjective and target of disgust here]—each one of them is God's own beloved—no matter what you, or any of your friends, or any social media post says differently about it.

Deeply loved by God. God's own beloved.

Maddening, isn't it? But that's what Jesus taught us.

I like to say: "you don't have to like them, but you do have to love them." And frankly, that kinda sucks (pardon my language).

See, there are people who I'd like to slap upside the head. There are people I'd be happy to never encounter again in this life. There are people whom I think cause more harm than good in this world—more crucifixion than resurrection—and sometimes I think that maybe it'd be better if they no longer were active participants in this...

...wait...

...yeah... that ain't right.

I mean, I don't even know them, really... did I really just go there?

See, all of those jerks that I'm thinking of have a history and a story and a truth of their lives that have shaped and colored their lives with the behavior and bluster that they presently express now.

Just like you. (I know, you don't "bluster"—being Minnesotan and all—but you know what I mean. Oh, and by the way, remember this: someone out there, known or not, thinks YOU are a big jerk. I mean, they might have "let it go" they say...but they haven't forgotten. You know how these people are.)

I lift this up to God and am reminded that I have to ask: Do I know their story?

See, that's what I'm thinking: it is our call as Christians to honor their story and to hold it as true. We don't have to agree with their conclusions, or behave just like they do, but their story is their truth.

I grew up with racism in the suburbs of Chicago. In my pre-teen years, I remember, in Des Plaines, Illinois, if you named a fairly major road, and I could tell you what ethnicity lived there and what "my people" thought about them. At the central park we shared, the black kids played basketball, the Latinos played soccer, the white kids played little-league. We knew what we thought about that "other".

By the teen years, my people moved out. "White Flight" they'd called it. I'll just let that phrase sit there.

By high school, I wound up living in a community without much soul, with the white middle-class looking (and commuting) back to the city.

So I sit on the porch now, here in Morgan Park, Dalooth, MN, and wave and chat and do my cheesy Paul thing (here in porch-drinking Spring) to the neighbors that walk along.

--Strollers and training wheels and joggers and slow-pokes, fluffy dogs and rat dogs and yoga pants and cargo shorts. Some are new here, in this town. Some have been here since the time you had to wipe the dust off your windows from the Concrete plant. Some remember the old grocery store, and some never even got to hang out at the Iron Mug.

Do I mention class? Do I mention color? Or political values or the who-they-are-and-what-I-think-of-them? No... I listen to their stories. They are real.

And like it or not, Mr. Pablo Van, you know, and it is good to let them know, that they are beloved children of God. I believe that. And by believe, I mean that do whatever I can with all my fits and starts to live INTO that.

So here's where the cheesy sermon part comes in (you knew it was coming):

I am reminded that paintings are beautiful for the balance and the contrast of colors, not uniformity. I am reminded that if I mix them all those different and seemingly opposing colors together and try to make them all the same they turn a brown/gray yucky color. \

So I learn to celebrate colors in my life to honor the contrast and balance of each of them. Let's go Bob Ross! Sky and earth and happy little trees. We have enough gray and brown up here. Six months of it.

Each story, each truth of each individual is the unique color of their loves.

And they are, friends, be they celebrating or suffering, struggling or standing-tall, at peace or angry, eloquent or bellicose, powerful, meek, accepting or intolerant—what I need to know is that they are beloved...children...of God.

*...And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?* (Acts 2:8) God's message to us. You, and he or she or that "other" we think of... you are a beloved child of God.

So let's take that message and walk that way in our lives of faith, Friends. These are the moments we are made for. These are the moments where God's last word of love are ringing off our lips and moving through our hands and heads and hearts.

This is precisely the time our faith should shine.

HYMN

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PRAYER

HYMN