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Luke 14:8-17, 25-27

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8:14-17

June 5, 2022
Pentecost Sunday

Don't we all long to see the face of God?

We long to see God and touch God and feel God deep within our souls. We long to experience that moment when we know God's presence and can say...yes, that is who God is.

But, what happens when you don't see God? What then? What happens when the longing stretches out for a painful length of time? When the violence in our world continues to grow. When tragedy seems so abusive. When death has plagued even the youngest of children. When our hearts are broken and our communities are divided.

Where, then, is the face of God?

I have often heard the face of God is like experiencing overwhelming beauty. When you hear a child's laughter, when you are overcome with the magnificence of nature, when a random act of kindness humbles you in gratitude. In those moments, knowing and feeling God seems so accessible. We know those moments. They are the moments that reassure us that something is out there so much greater than ourselves.

And...it would be wonderful if we could stay in those moments. We can point to God's spirit among us and name it and understand it and know that God is good. But, what does God's spirit feel like in the broken moments, when we are on our knees, confused, hurt, scared, full of doubt. How do we understand the Spirit of God then?

It's an important question on Pentecost Sunday. The day we recognize the moment God sent power into the world, into individual hearts, to move and grow within humanity. Our text from Acts reads,

"When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples 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."

It's a spectacular scene. I have often thought how lucky the disciples were to get that experience. To see and feel and touch what God's Spirit was like. It's a longing of God to be known, to be with humanity, to change them at the deepest, most profound level. And it must have felt so good. So beautiful. It was an instantaneous moment of glory.

But, how many of you think of this kind of moment and rationalize that it is just one of the great Bible stories that happened way back when? God doesn't work like that now. Or, does he? How does God's Spirit show us for us today, in our world, with our challenges and with our struggles? Where is our violent wind rushing down from heaven?

There are a couple of ways we can think about the Spirit of God. First, some of us might be lucky like the disciples to have that crazy, powerful moment of holy disruption. I do believe that still happens. But my guess is that for most of us, it's more subtle. Not less existent than on that first Pentecost but more nuanced in the complicated world we live in.

Presbyterian pastor, Meda Stamper, states it this way:

*"The promise of the Spirit does not come to completely faithful, courageous people, already loving one another and the world boldly, already worshiping in spirit and truth. It comes in the midst of confusion and fear...and it is the answer to that. Jesus makes the promise of the Spirit...at the very moment when such grace seems most beyond the disciples grasp and ours."*¹

Plato described the presence of the Spirit as a gradual clarifying vision. Where "true vision begins with the eyes and deepens into some fundamental faculty of perception, call it mind or soul or spirit. The notion of progressive perception suggests that the eternal process of seeing God in Christ can begin here and now, as we're trained to behold increasingly more of God's beauty."²

Two things to note from these descriptions of the Spirit. It doesn't come just to courageous, faithful people. It comes in the midst of our brokenness. And the second thing is that it often comes to us gradually and deepens as we are able to comprehend the full beauty of God.

What that says to me is be patient and take time to look. Because the face of God is right there waiting to be uncovered slowly and progressively.

In Paul's letter to the church in Rome he describes God's Spirit as bearing witness *with* our spirit. Not that God's Spirit simply notices us as some entity out there, looking in. But a Spirit witnessing *with* us, alongside us. The presence of the Spirit is a relationship, an intimate knowing of who we are, a divine love that reaches around us and through us and in us, creating beauty right where we are.

Remember the words of Acts...God says that God will pour out the Spirit upon all flesh. All. Everyone. You and me. And that changes us. God's beauty has been poured into us. That's the promise, the reality, of the Spirit. That is Pentecost.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/day-of-pentecost-3/commentary-on-john-148-17-25-27-5>

² <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/first-person/death-s-vision>

So, now the big question. What now?

Let me share with you a suggestion by theologian John van de Laar. He writes, *“Across the globe human beings suffer from a blindness to the Spirit’s presence and activity. When we use the earth as nothing more than a resource to enrich ourselves, we have failed to recognise the Spirit. When we justify killing, exploiting, marginalising or dehumanising others, we have failed to see the Spirit in them. When we embrace a rampant individualism and consumerism, we have failed to recognise God’s Spirit and the community of all things in God’s Spirit. Pentecost is a wake up call for our world – how different might our politics, economics and environmental policies be if we recognised God’s Spirit in all things, and if we took time to really learn our common language?”*³

I love his words. It’s a call to see the face of God in one another. It’s a reminder that the beauty we seek, the beauty we are desperate for, is already right here...within us. Pentecost charges us with seeing that beauty and claiming it. And then, it reminds that we are forever changed because of it. And with that knowledge comes a holy, sacred responsibility.

So maybe we don’t sit around waiting for those tongues of fire and the rushing wind of God to dramatically swoop in and fix what’s broken. Because if we think of God’s Spirit as the CEO of world peace, we have missed the point. If we think of God’s Spirit like that we will continue to be disillusioned, disappointed, and dissatisfied with our world.

Pentecost says the face of God is already here with us and within us. Stop waiting. Slow down and look. Feel it within your soul. Let it grow. Because that beauty, the peaceful, loving, kind world we long for is already within us, given to you so that you can be bold and fearless. To empower each of us to say the world doesn’t have to be the way it is. God has given us agency through the Spirit to love all things, to strive for peace and justice, to bring about the kingdom of God that we have been entrusted with.

We are the face of God and the Spirit of God is here. That is Pentecost. God with us.

Thanks be to God.

³ <https://sacredise.com/pentecost-c/>