

Pentecost Sunday

June 4, 2017

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown, MD

Readings: Galatians 5: 22-25; Acts 2: 1 - 21

In Ghana, West Africa they tell a story of three women who very much wanted children but despite all efforts had not conceived. As a last resort, they decided to go to a local medicine man. After they explained their problem, the medicine man told them he could help them, but there they needed to understand that they would each go mad when they gave birth so they needed to think about this decision carefully. After long thought, the women returned to the medicine man. Two of the women decided that, yes, they wanted the medicine. The third woman said no. If it could make her go mad, she wanted no part of having a baby.

Sure enough in due time the two women who took the medicine gave birth to beautiful babies. They waited several months after their infants were born, waiting to lose their minds but nothing happened. So they went back to the medicine man and asked, "When are we going to go crazy?" The medicine man asked them if they were not already crazy and they said, "No." Then as they talked, their babies began to fuss. So both women began to sway and bounce to calm the babies. They began making funny noises and strange facial expressions to soothe them. The medicine man began to laugh. "Look at you," he said to the women. "Who is making the music you are dancing to and what are the strange cooings and faces you make and the smiles without reason. Is this not craziness?" he asked. "And I tell you, with children they will make you even crazier with each passing year. You will make fools of yourselves in public and private."

When the third woman heard this story, she went back to the medicine man and said she too now wanted to have a baby, but he told her it was too late. Her fear of what others might say about her, her unwillingness to risk the unexpected had prevented her from her deepest-most desire. ¹

It seems small babies can cause the most dignified adult to appear to have taken leave of their senses. From "kitchey, kitchey koo" to "this little piggy"... Making distorted faces, altering our voice pitch to turning a spoon of food into an airplane. It even stops seeming crazy to those who love their child. Am I right?

I wonder if that isn't a bit of what it seemed on the first Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they began to act strange. They seemed propelled out of

hiding into the streets of Jerusalem. They were talking to anyone and everyone. Their urgency and joy raised eyebrows and drew attention. Some even accused them of being drunk. Like parents who catch sight of themselves doing the darnest things to get their child to laugh, sleep or eat, I wonder if those disciples looked at one another with part surprise and part giddiness. Who could have imagined we would act like this?

But these uneducated Galileans were not making strange babbling sounds. They were speaking in recognizable languages that were not their native tongue. The fear and anxiety of the previous weeks seemed to have vanished — blown and burned away by the Holy Spirit. They were beyond worrying what others might think. They were filled to the gills with glimmers of understanding and overwhelming hope and wonder that just seemed to spill out. Like a loving parent who wants the very best for their child, these disciples looked into the eyes of the crowds with a love so deep and surprising, that they found they wanted to do whatever it might take to help these others know the Lord they had come to know, trust and love.

Like a grandmother with a photo brag book, they proceeded to share pictures of Jesus, God in flesh, to anyone who would give them an ear. Their genuine enthusiasm was infectious. And miraculously, people began to see a family resemblance between this Jesus and these disciples. They too seemed to care about everyone, regardless of nationality, gender, social status, economic class. Like Jesus, they too came to save not to condemn. They too would heal, forgive, worship, feed, bless, uplift in the family name of Jesus. And it is that family to which we too belong, through the waters of holy baptism. And get this — we too have been given the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We too are called to go into the community to share our stories and pictures of love. “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

At one time it wasn't so rare to hear a Mom calling in the children for supper. “Come ‘n get it,” she might say. But disciples have long known that isn't how it works for disciples of Jesus. Our ministry is not to stand on the doorsteps of the church yelling, “Come and get it!” Instead, the wind of the Spirit clearly says to us, “Go get ‘em!” Pentecost reminds us that the Lord has brought together the people and resources later known as “church,” known as Haven, for everyday disciples to be prepared and equipped as missionaries. On Pentecost, we are reminded that God never meant for the disciples to stay behind walls or build new temple fortresses for a new elite tribe of God. With the Holy Spirit coursing through their veins, disciples are to be deployed each day in neighborhoods, schools,

workplaces, gyms, homes, restaurants with the words of Jesus echoing in our hearts, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (John 20: 21b) “Go get ‘em!” That’s not a call to be obnoxious, in-your-face aggressive or deceitfully alluring. You and I are called to go into the everyday mission field of our life bearing God’s resemblance in how we love and serve those in need as the fruits of the Spirit flow through us, into the world. And when the opportunity presents itself, pulling out the family pictures and sharing the stories about Jesus and what difference he has meant to those first disciples and us.

Maybe we should offer a warning to those we baptize. Being loved by God, saved by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit could make you mad, or at least a bit weird in the world’s eyes. As you grow into the fullness of your baptism, you may find yourself so caught in God’s love that you act like a crazy Mom or grandmother, doing whatever it takes to bring peace, strength and joy. Your face contorts with empathy and hope as you listen to another’s sorrow. You sacrifice some of your own comfort to provide for others in need. You do a touchdown-type dance or a few whoops as you celebrate another child of God’s small victory. If others ask you, “Who is making the music you are dancing to and what are the strange cooings and faces you make and the smiles without reason,” don’t worry, the Holy Spirit will give you the simple and right words to say.

Be fueled today by God’s word, meal and fellowship for your missionary work this week wherever you may be. And when you hear at the end of worship today, “Go in peace,” can’t you just hear our mothering Lord saying, “Drive safely now. Be careful out there.” But don’t forget that other part of the farewell at the church door, “Serve the Lord!” Translated, that means, “The Holy Spirit is in you. Go get ‘em!” And when we answer, “*Thanks be to God,*” that’s no throwaway line. We are saying, “You provide the peace, power and mission, Lord. Now, put me in coach. Put me in the mission field to help win others for the Kingdom team!” Wow! Isn’t that something? A bit exciting and scary at the same time. Maybe instead of a quiet dismal of worshipers, every once in a while we should pretend we are more like a pumped up team bursting out of the locker room for the second half of the championship game. Wouldn’t that be something? People might think we’re crazy... maybe drunk... and we could say, “It’s only 10:30 in the morning! “

Linda M Alessandri

1. As told by the Rev. Rosina A Ampah. Cited by Douglas L Meyer, <http://www.holyspirit-elca.org/SERMONS/2006%20Sermons/120306html> and retold by King Duncan in his sermon "Wide Enough for All (Mother's Day)