

Pentecost 2021
Acts 2: 1- 13
First United Church of Christ, Northfield, MN
May 23, 2021
Rev. Wendy Vander Hart

May God still speak through these words of scripture and sermon.

I never thought this day would come!

Will you turn to your neighbor and say or write in the Chat to the Digital Greeter on Zoom- "I never thought this day would come!"

You know that feeling right? You know that feeling when you have been promised something but have to wait for it. Do you know that feeling of having to wait for something and the waiting feels really long and you wonder if it's ever going to happen. You know the feeling, right? Maybe you were waiting for something you could taste or smell or feel. Maybe it was something that you could only imagine what it would be like when it finally happened. Maybe it was something for which you were utterly unprepared. You know that feeling where the minutes get longer, the hours drag on, the days seem endless. You know that longing and ache and wondering- when will it ever happen?

I never thought this day would come! I imagine that is what the disciples felt from the moment they met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus, by the sea when he cooked them breakfast, through a locked door where they were hidden, even as he ascended from their midst. With each visit the resurrected Jesus made a promise- "this is not the end. Wait! An Advocate, the Spirit will carry you forward, wait for it in the city, together, it will surely come."

How odd to have witnessed a resurrected-from-the-dead-Jesus telling you to wait with the best news humanity could ever receive. And wait the disciples did. And when that day came, when that day for which they waited finally arrived- it was unmistakable- wind rushing, flames alighting, tongues speaking, confounding those they met who ascribed a drunken stupor to what they witnessed. But the disciples were not drunk- they were supercharged with the Holy Spirit and armed with good news. They could finally tell the amazing news that what appeared to be the same old, same old of empire crucifying the body and spirit of a human being who questioned the system, built a movement and proclaimed "love is the only way forward"- was NOT an end. The same old, same old actually became the new thing God is doing.

Matthew Myer Boulton in a podcast entitled Strange New World said this in the episode, Understanding Easter, part seven¹ "That day of the first Easter. It's not about whether everything has changed. No. Easter is a declaration that nothing has changed. Deep down I mean, that God is still with us and for us, that the long-promised day of jubilee is now beginning to dawn. And despite how things look and feel that despite the losses, despite the claim that... God has abandoned us, or that the whole thing is a lie... despite all claims that everything has changed... and all that matters now is power, and violence and vengeance. No, it's not true, nothing has changed. God's promises and God's covenant remain yesterday, today and tomorrow. Just as God freed people in the past, so God will free people in the future. That journey begins today, not ends, begins."

Easter may not change anything about who God is, but it changes us on the journey that begins after it. It is important to remember resurrection at this point because as the disciples lived it, there were only fifty days between Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Only fifty days- hence the word Pentecost- fifty

¹ Matthew Myer Boulton, Strange New World podcast, "[Understanding Easter, part seven.](#)"

days of waiting that seemed like an eternity for a promised new beginning. And we know that every new beginning starts when something ends.

There is simple evidence of this point around us in the Northern Hemisphere experiencing springtime. It has always amazed me that among the dying stalks of sedum that have completed their work of flowering and greening in autumn, the new buds are already emerging ready to winter over and pop up in the Spring. Every new beginning is tied to an ending.

Would we be here as a community if Jesus had not died and been resurrected? It is sad to wonder this, and it completely indicts our society to even think it, but would we be doing anti-racism work with the fervor we are doing if George Floyd had not been murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis one year ago? Terrible things happen, new things begin. Tragedy is not the end. Execution is not the end. Diagnoses, divorce, addiction are not the end. With the bedrock promises of God before us- ends always hold the potential of a beginning.

When something looks like an end, we need to honor it and grieve its loss. Some things as they exist today need to end, like racism, so the fullness of life God intends can emerge. There is no acceptable reason that black, brown and indigenous bodies should experience a lesser life because of the color of their skin. As things end, we need to look at what is beginning and be prepared for surprise.

When I interviewed for this Interim Senior Minister role on January 6, 2020, none of us in that conversation could have imagined how the year would unfold. There is much we have lost in this pandemic. No doubt about it. Even being together today in the building AND online is reason to grieve.

It also gives us reason to hope. We must take stock of what we have gained because of this pandemic time not in spite of it, but because of it. Ministries end, practices shift, new things rise up and we must continue to take stock of what we have learned because something ended.

The good news of Pentecost is that God continually equips us to deal with endings and create new beginnings. Dealing with endings is best done in community. Where at Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan the Spirit descended like a dove on just one person, in the story of Pentecost the Spirit descends upon the many and still more people who witnessed the disciples' passion were intrigued and drawn together. There is real power when flame-licked people find each other and set about to practice the courageous love and justice of Jesus. Pentecost jump-started the Easter revolution, the living "as if" death ultimately has no power over us.

Pentecost is the sending. Pentecost is the equipping. Pentecost is the readying for the journey of proclaiming a new day that says no to vengeance, says no to complacency, no to crushing hierarchy and greed. Pentecost is our embrace of God's ways- that "even in the midst of great difficulty and struggle, in the midst of betrayal and desertion, mockery, torture and death the God of life and love prevails- and for that reason, because we have been awakened or reawakened to this deepest truth about reality – that love prevails over hate, mercy over vengeance, dignity over contempt, life over death, for that very reason, we can rest assured and we can act assured."²

We can commence and continue the journey started by a fearful band of followers who were transformed by the gift they were promised and for which they waited – the Spirit- that enlivens, gives us hope, builds our courage, assures our faith.

Let this Pentecost be a new beginning- the beginning for which we have waited and longed. Imagine it- New leaders, new ways to worship, learn, serve and play together. Imagine it- the end of racism, the beginning of

² Ibid.

loving kindness for all, no more weeping, everyone knows they are beloved. Imagine it- unity rather than division, hope instead of dread, peace and an end to bloodshed. When that day comes, and it will, it will be the Spirit's doing through us and for others. Come, Holy Spirit, come! Amen.