



Rummage Sale: Sermon for Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

(Psalm 104:24-34, Romans 8:14-17 and John 14:8-17, 25-27)

Pentecost Sunday, June 9th, 2019

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois

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Text: All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (v. 4)

Items are being collected for the rummage sale. Clean out the attic, haul stuff up from the basement, downsize, and get rid of the stuff you no longer use. That treadmill is not a clothes hanger. We aren't the only ones having a rummage sale.

In her book, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, Phyllis Tickle says that the big "C" Church is going through one of its own Rummage Sales as the Church cleans out the attic and basement and evaluates what's alive and what's dead, the Spirit of Christ and dead tradition that has lost its purpose. Every 500 years or so the Church goes through a cataclysmic change. She goes on to say that these are generational shifts that carry on through more than one lifetime. The first was "monasticism", which saved Western Christianity from the barbarians and the "Dark Age". There was the Great Reformation of the 16th century. Tickle believes that we are in another The Great Emergence.

The seeds of what Tickle calls the current rummage sale were sown by the Age of Exploration-- Christopher Columbus and the confirmation that the world is not flat, Charles Darwin and the Theory of Evolution, William James and Sigmund Freud and the birth of modern psychology, and Albert Einstein with the Theory of Relativity which tells us that Time and everything is "relative". Include also the advent of the radio and television, the automobile, air travel and space travel, the world wide web and twitter, each in their own way making the world seem smaller and more intimate.

Each one of these "rummage sales" left a social, political, economic, intellectual, and cultural shift in their wake. (p. 120)¹

On my desk I have a quote from retired U.S. Army Chief of Staff Eric Shineski which reads: "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less."

Change is all around us. When I moved back to Peoria over 10 years ago, I felt a bit like Rip Van Winkle. It was not the same city of my youth. Peoria's industrial diversity had shrunk dramatically.

1. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* c. 2008

Consider the Warehouse District or the Averyville neighborhood or the Southend. My grandfather and great uncle retired from Pabst Brewing. Other family members worked at the Bemis Bag Company or Hiram Walker. I had breakfast with grade school and high school classmates were never left Peoria but went directly from high school graduation on a Friday into well paying factory jobs at Keystone and Caterpillar on Monday. They were able to comfortably and raise their family on a single household income. Those days are largely gone.

To me the biggest bell-weather of change in our city is the annual Santa Claus Parade. As a child I had to sit on my father's shoulders three rows deep in order to see over the crowd. Now you can walk the parade route and pass blocks with only a handful of spectators.

The Peoria Journal Star had a morning and evening edition as well as a plethora of reporters. Now most of their product is largely outsourced and staffed by only a handful or two of people.

The list can go on and on. Now you must hear what I am saying. I am not pining or longing for the good old days because there was much about those old days that were not good. Polio, for example.

All of this means that we are moving from an era of cultural Christianity where it was presumed that everyone went to church. Membership in a mainline church was a sign of respectability. Not so much any more.

I remember walking to church with my daughter many years ago when we lived in a small Iowa town. As we walked through the town square and saw all of the cars parked one of my daughters asked who the cars belonged to. I replied that they belong to the people who lived in the apartments above the shops. "Aren't they going to church," she asked. "No," I replied. "Most people don't go to church."

Now churches must compete with the culture as it hasn't had to do since the first century. Travel teams compete with religious commitments as do work responsibilities and social opportunities. None of this is bad. It is just the new reality in which we find ourselves.

As Bob Dylan sang over 50 years ago, "the times they are a changin' ... you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a changin'".

We are, I believe, living in a Pentecost moment. And today's lessons have something to say to us.

Jesus once said that the Spirit of God is like the wind; The wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8, NRSV)

On the first Pentecost in the Luke-Acts tradition the disciples were all together when suddenly the air was filled with the rush of a violent wind. The Holy Spirit rushed in unexpectedly from nowhere and manifested itself as little tongues of fire and rested on each one of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and emboldened to speak to people of every age, every race, every nationality in ways that they could understand.

Their passion caused such a stir that some thought that the disciples were drunk. But they were not. As Peter said to the assembled onlookers:

We are not drunk...No this is a God-moment for as the prophet Joel declared long ago about this day, In the last days God will pour out the Spirit upon all flesh, your children their prophesy and challenge the old ways and understandings, your young men will see visions of what could be And even the old will be caught up in the Spirit and once again dream dreams of what could be and ask, "Why not".

As we focus upon the work of the Holy Spirit--God's Spirit with us--the 104th Psalm reminds us that God creates and recreates.

O Lord, the Psalmist marveled, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures--both great and small. ...

When you take away their breath, they die and return to dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground (vss. 1 &2, 30)

On the last night that Jesus was with his disciples, in John's gospel we hear his comforting promise that God will send the Holy Spirit to teach and remind us what it means to take Jesus seriously--to be a dedicated disciple rather than a casual Christian. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives.

In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul said that those who take Jesus seriously are led by the Spirit of God and adopted heirs of God's kingdom. It is this same Spirit, this spirit that gives the breath of life, this Holy Spirit of Pentecost that leads us into the way of Christ.

Jesus once said, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This Way is not an easy way of life. As Paul said in our epistle less, the Jesus way will lead to suffering in his name for we cannot help but to identify with the least, the last, the lost, the lonely, the forgotten, and the forsaken. This way is the way of love--real love, world changing love. It is a love that is not marked by human eloquence or angelic ecstasy but of humble service.

It cares for others more than for self.

It doesn't demand on getting its own way.

It doesn't keep score of other people's sin.

It trusts that God is big and in charge therefore it doesn't look back but keeps on going to the very end.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us of the struggles that the Early Church faced as it moved from its Jewish roots into a Gentile world. It was hard. It was painful. There were backlashes. They had to adjust all of their presuppositions. It was fraught with danger.

So it is today. We live in a time when authority, alliances, and customs are questioned. It seems that the center is no longer holding. We are bombarded by debates about global warming--is it true or false? Immigration, economic security and nationalism. The list goes on. We are living in an age of free floating anxiety and fear. And when we are anxious and afraid "we become suspicious of others and sometimes even paranoid." We look for someone to blame rather than to take responsibility. All too often blame leads to hate and demonization.

The Jesus, though, gives us a new word.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.

God is with us. Do not be afraid.

O God our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come

Our shelter from the stormy blast

And our eternal home.

Under the shadow of Thy throne they saints have dwelt secure
Sufficient is Thine arm alone

And our defense is sure.

Amen.