

Acts 2: 1 – 21
Romans 8: 14 – 17
John 14: 8 – 17
Pentecost, Yr. C.

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Bainbridge Island, Washington
May 15, 2016

“No Troubled Hearts”

A funny thing happened on the way to Pentecost this year at Saint Barnabas. A decision of mine has changed not only my life, but also the life of this congregation. That decision may have come, like the rush of a violent wind to some, or like a phone call that comes in the night, or, perhaps, like manna from heaven, changing everything in one fell swoop. However it impacted us, this is a different sort of Pentecost than we might have envisioned last month.

I expect that few of the disciples, in that upper room, really understood what was to come when Jesus talked about sending the Holy Spirit to them. Had they known, some of them might have left early. I suspect that there was much uncertainty for all of them about what the future would hold for them. Their leader had died publicly, been resurrected to life in some sort of strange way, met with them, talked with them for a brief time, and then left them by way of some celestial elevator with vague promises of some sort of help to come. We remember that Peter went back to his old life of fishing for a time. But there they were, in Jerusalem, sitting around, perhaps arguing about what the future might be, should be, could be. And then it all changed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and energized to go out into the streets of Jerusalem to preach the Good News of God in Christ Jesus. Some thought they were drunk with new wine; others were amazed and perplexed. I suspect some of the disciples were also amazed and perplexed themselves – what had come over them?

I have been thinking about Saint Barnabas twelve years ago. It was not a good time for this parish. Its rector had been fired by vestry after a turbulent time— technically, it’s called the dissolution of a pastoral relationship. Such difficulties are deeply painful and challenging for a congregation. So what did Saint Barnabas do in the aftermath of that painful period? It started a major building campaign to replace its church organ and in doing so, raised over \$500,000 dollars and did a significant renovation of its beloved worship space to accommodate the new organ. Then it survived a difficult relationship with its new priest-in-charge and, after navigating that clergy change, raised another \$220,000 for renovation of its other buildings while launching a well-run search process that culminated in my arrival in August of 2007. All that in a period of 38 months. I have joked that Saint Barnabas is at its best when it is not plagued with clergy help. But the truth is this is a Holy Spirit filled congregation that is fully capable of being a community of faith without much clergy help because the Holy Spirit is here in this place and in the hearts and minds of its members. This church does not need someone to show it the Father. This congregation does not depend on someone in a collar to show it where God is. This congregation appreciates the ministry of its clergy, when that ministry is done properly, but its ministry is mutual and self-sustaining as we feed and nurture and support each other through good times and bad.

I suspect that some of the disciples were upset and terrified of the changes brought by the Holy Spirit. Certainly, none of their lives were ever the same. Many of them died as martyrs for their

faith and all of them had their ordinary lives forever altered by those tongues of flame. Change often does that to all of us. Even the change we seek can be disorienting and unsettling. Change is hard; change is uncertain; change brings unexpected things to all of us. When our cheese gets moved, it is doubly unsettling because we are not the agents of that change – we are the recipients of change imposed on us. We hear the words of the prophet Joel – that the young will see visions, sons and daughters will prophesy, and the old will dream dreams and we are fearful because the future will not be like the present and many of us prefer the known present to the unknown future.

Philip says to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus refuses to do that and points out that Philip is asking for a guarantee that is actually insulting to God and Jesus. The disciples have seen evidence of God’s grace and blessing throughout the course of Jesus’ ministry. Moreover, Jesus makes this stunning claim – “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.” The one who believes in Christ Jesus will do the works Jesus did and, in fact, will do greater works than these. But Jesus also says that the world cannot receive this Spirit of truth because the world neither sees nor knows God. But the disciples can see and know God because God abides with them and will be in them.

I have seen this very thing right here at Saint Barnabas. This congregation, for 70 years, has done the work of ministry. It has done this work in easy times and in hard times. It has done the work of ministry with good and loving assistance from clergy and it has done ministry in spite of its clergy. The flame of ministry has never gone out of this congregation and I believe that it never will. This congregation has all the gifts it needs – and more – to do God’s work in this place. This work is not always dramatic, not always written up in newspapers or social media, not always even known by all the members of Saint Barnabas. It is often quiet work, done by individuals or small groups. Sometimes it involves money, sometimes just people’s good will and time. But it is steady, sustaining, and life-giving work and it touches more people than we can ever know. This place and its people matter – matter to each other, matter to the larger community, matter to the world, and truly matter to God.

Jesus says to his disciples- “do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” I think Jesus says that because the disciples had troubled hearts and were afraid. Their world had been so radically changed by Jesus and now he was leaving them and they were not sure they would survive. We often put our trust in leaders only to have our trust diminished by their actions. We depend on others, sometimes too much. We depend on others too little because we have been hurt by our leaders. But this is not a human leader we are talking about here. This is God incarnate who reminds us that in God, we can be sure. God is with us, God is in us, God loves us and cares for us without fail.

None of us can see the future clearly other than knowing that things will change. There may well be other Pentecosts in our lives when violent winds will come and sweep away the old and leave us in a new place. But for now, we keep that mantra of Jesus – “do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” We remember the wonderful words of Julian of Norwich – “All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.”

Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” And what are those commandments? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, Love one another as I have loved you.

So, yes, a funny thing happened on the way to Pentecost at Saint Barnabas this year. But no troubled hearts and no fear for us. We all stand in God’s love now and forever. Amen.