

5-23-21
Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21

On Each of Them

I've lost count of how many weddings I've celebrated. But Grace and Guy Jarboe still hold the record for having the wedding that was the most fun of all the ones I've done. I know I married some of you who are here and some who are with us on Facebook this morning, and I don't want to offend you, but Grace and Guy will be a touch act to follow. Grace was 85 when they married, and Guy was a few years older. They had both had long and happy marriages. Their spouses died, and Grace and Guy met at line dancing at the Senior Center in the town where we lived. I don't know if it was love at first sight, but something clicked between the two of them, and it wasn't long before they came to see me about getting married. Grace had been a Presbyterian all her life as her parents had been before her. Guy was Catholic. But Guy loved Grace so much that he got up every Sunday morning and went to 6:30 Mass at his church across town so that he could come by and pick her up to come to worship at her church at 10:30. Guy was more faithful than some of our elders. It took him a while to catch on to how we did things, but not long. He was a little lost at first trying to navigate bulletin instead of a Missal, but he eventually figured things out. He soon even decided it was OK to take communion in our church, so long as I promised not to tell his priest. I never did.

I talked to Grace one day while we were planning for the wedding. Guy wanted his priest to participate so that he would be considered married in his Church as well as in ours. Grace wasn't so sure about that. She thought if I did the wedding and signed the license, that ought to be good enough for everybody. Most of us know it's not. It was fine with me and with our Session

for Guy's priest to not only be there but to do whatever he needed to do to insure that they were not living in sin. But Grace just wasn't sure. Some of us Presbyterians can be pretty set in our ways, and if you need an example of what that looks like, I wish you had known Grace. That community was and still is about half Baptist and half Catholic and the rest of us fight over the scraps. But Grace was a lifelong Presbyterian and she thought it would be a lot easier if Guy would just join her church. You can probably figure out how apt that was to happen. I didn't want them to break up with the wedding already on the calendar, but I made things worse when I suggested that maybe she ought to go to Mass with Guy once in a while since he was so faithful to come to worship with her. That would never do, she said. She had never been to worship in the Catholic Church, but she knew it was different from ours. There were things she could do and things she wasn't supposed to. And she didn't want to look silly when she didn't know which was which. I told her that I was sure Guy would be willing to help her figure all that out, but I didn't gain much ground. I even offered to go to Mass with her sometime other than Sunday, and we'd figure it out together. That didn't work either. I don't remember that Grace ever went to church with Guy. But he faithfully kept his own tradition and learned to keep ours too because he loved her.

His priest did come and participate in the wedding. That's a whole nuther story for another day. What made their wedding so much fun was that there was absolutely no pretense about it. I think both of them bought new clothes, but it wasn't anything like the big, splashy events that we've grown accustomed to. It was mostly their children and grandchildren, some friends from both their churches and from line dancing, and when we finished at the Church we all went out to dinner together, and that turned out to be a problem. Whoever took the reservation at the restaurant must have forgotten to put it in the book, so when forty or so of us showed up, they had to scramble to get us taken care of. Neither Grace nor Guy threw a fit, and we all enjoyed sitting around and celebrating with them while the staff shamefully worked things

out. We got them married in a way that suited both the Catholics and the Presbyterians. But we never got Grace to go to church with Guy.

Because of the nature of that community and because of the complications that go along with life wherever we live, Grace and Guy's wedding was far from the only marriage I sealed that involved people of different faith traditions. I did a destination wedding in Florida for a couple I didn't know. She was Korean-American and Presbyterian and he was Hindu. They had three weddings that weekend to appease both of their deep-pocketed sets of grandparents, but I did the one that involved signing a license. Ours was last in that lineup. Everyone there was a stranger to me, but one of the guests came to me before the service started and asked what kind of wedding this one was going to be. She said he had been to the Korean one and to the Hindu one and she had no idea what was going on in either of them. When I told her that this one would be a straight out of the Book of Worship Presbyterian service, she huffed and said, "Well, I might as well go ahead to the reception because I won't like this one either. I'm Pentecostal!" Deanna wasn't invited to any of those, but she was interested in how they all came out. When I came home she asked how the wedding had gone. I told her that I got along well with the Koreans and the Hindus, but it was the Christians that gave me trouble.

We gather here to celebrate two big events today. They are connected in interesting ways. You heard the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit from the Book of Acts today. Many Christians celebrate this day as the birth of the Church. The people who followed Jesus had been through all the things that we have celebrated with them through the Church Year. They had found hope and peace in Jesus that they had not found in other pursuits, and then he had been taken from them in some of the most unjust proceedings they had ever seen. And then he was among them again, restoring their hope, but confusing their minds. And then he began to explain to them that continuing the work they had begun together would be up to them. He would

return to God from whom he had come, and they would go about the business of changing the world and establishing the Church.

Then came the events of today. Strange, by any denominational standard. Rushing wind. Tongues of flame. People speaking in languages they didn't know, and others understanding what they said. Bystanders knew that these people used wine in some of their religious activities, so they thought they had just over imbibed. But then Peter rose to preach in the middle of all that and preached with such clarity that somehow all these things made sense. These are not drunk, he insisted. They are not filled with new wine. They are filled with the gift of God's own Spirit. And that Spirit would enable them to do things far more important than what they were seeing today!

The most important thing about today is not the wind or the fire or the speaking in tongues. The most important thing about today is that whatever happened to those people that day happened to all of them. Luke tells the story, and he uses so much inclusive language that it's hard to miss his intent. They were all together. When the wind came, it filled the entire house where they were. It didn't just blow through the Catholic rooms or the Presbyterians ones. It filled the entire house. All of them, Luke says, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. When those tongues of fire fell, they fell on each of them. Now we staid and decent and in order Presbyterians would probably like to have sat that part out, but friends, I'm here to tell you that the Holy Spirit came to the Presbyterians that day just as surely as it came to the Pentecostals. All of that confusion of language business was never designed to create the conflict it has among us. The purpose of that was not to make some into super Christians and to leave others out. It was all about being sure that everyone could hear and understand what God was doing among them. There were people of faith from all over the world they knew in Jerusalem for the Festival they were celebrating. They didn't have those little translation cards we see in airports and retail places telling people how to ask for a translator. They were left to do the best they could as they arranged for their sacrifices and

their lodging while they were there to celebrate. But they were not left to fend for themselves when it came to hearing God's Good News. Somehow, God made it possible for each of them to hear what they need to hear in language they could understand and use to tell others, beginning that very day. That Spirit didn't fall on some but on all. That is the joy we celebrate today—that the Good News of salvation and hope in Jesus Christ is not just ours it is for all of us.

Even for two girls about to begin their high school adventure. Two girls who have spent their formative years so far right here among us. Their heritage means that they didn't get a lot of choice about that. Their granddad saw to it that their parents brought them here whether they wanted to come or not. They were baptized here, and they've seen the page in the book that says so! Oh sure, they've wandered off to Summit Baptist with their friends. When you live here that's what you do. But today they stand before you and me and, more importantly, before God to tell all of us that they believe what we believe. And this is where they will ground their faith and their life while they continue to grow and to understand what God is saying and doing among them.

They and I have met for several weeks earlier this spring. We've talked about important things and they understand what they're doing. Much to the late Bess Simmons' dismay, we don't make our kids memorize the catechism anymore. But we have talked about what it means to follow Jesus down the paths we follow, and one of those things is that we know our path is not the only one. We know that following Jesus means different things to different people. Not everyone is as honest about that as we are. There are some, probably many, who would like nothing better than to snag these girls and convert them to their way of thinking. But I've talked to both of them enough to know that they believe what you and I believe—that following Jesus may look different for some people, but for us, it looks like welcome. We believe all that inclusive stuff Luke believed. We believe that the Spirit has

come to us just as surely as it has come to all those other folks, whether they believe it about us or not.

The Spirit came to each one of those gathered in Jerusalem in a way that made it possible for each of them to know God's love and to find God's grace. That same Spirit is blowing around in this room today, calling each one of us here to attend to what God is saying in our context and to believe that it applies there.

Remember Grace and Guy? They lived and line danced, and Guy kept coming to church with her for less than a year before Grace had a massive stroke and died. I don't think I've ever seen many more heartbroken people than Guy. He went back to his church after we buried Grace from ours. But he used to come check in on us once in a while. He never bought into the fact that there was difference between us. Guy's gone now, too. God will sort out who's supposed to be married to whom in the place they are now. But they sure were happy and fun for a little while.

These girls with whom we celebrate today have a lifetime ahead of them. We can't know what it will be. We hope it is full of joy and laughter and fulfillment and contentment (that part won't come for a while yet, I suspect!). But whatever it is, it takes a new turn today as they have told us and the world that we believe this Holy Spirit business is important and that it is for everybody.

Come, Holy Spirit is our prayer this day and every day. Because it is by the coming of the Spirit that we experience God's love for us and that we find ways to share it with all the everyones God wants to know it. Thanks be to God. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

We come to you as your Spirit-filled people today. You're probably a bit shaken to hear that from the Presbyterians. But we believe that there are not Spirit filled people and some other kind of people. We are your people. Your Spirit has come to us to claim us and to guide us into truth we have not yet experienced. We

need not fear your Spirit, and we don't. Your Spirit speaks Presbyterian just as clearly as it speaks Pentecostal. It speaks of decency and of order just as surely as it speaks of spontaneity and what looks like confusion to us. Help us to be grateful, O God, that you speak to all of us in ways we can understand, and that you empower us to speak to one another in the same way if we will. Help us to find ways to understand and to accept one another, even while we differ on things that don't much matter. We give thanks today for your people everywhere and for the bond that unites us in spite of ourselves. We thank you for those who teach, especially those who listen to you as they do. We pray for any who have been hurt by your Church when it could not be as welcoming as they needed it to be or as faithful as you need it to be. Help us to follow you in all things and to always remember that your mercy is great.

We pray for nations, communities, families and all the other groups in which we live. We pray especially today for those that are torn by violence or by discord. We give thanks for short term signs of peace we see in the Middle East. Our cynicism says it won't last, but our hope in you says it can. Help us to be thankful and hopeful that at least for now people have stopped killing each other. Help us to have the same hopes for our community and for all places where guns and drugs and hate still dominate. Don't let our cynicism take over our hearts. Help us to believe that things can be different and that they will be when we follow you instead of our own way.

We pray for people in need. Some are hungry. Some are lazy. Some don't have work. Others won't do the work they have. Some are children who have little control over their lives, sometimes because their parents are sorry and sometimes because they don't know better. Some struggle with substances that are destroying them and others struggle with attitudes that are destroying them just as surely. Help us to care for one another and to find ways to help all of us be productive and to live in peace alongside one another

We pray for our church on this day as we look toward a brighter future. Be with us as we welcome people back to worship and other activities hopeful that we are safe and that we can live and work and play together again without fear.

We pray for Natalie and Lydia and the important steps they have taken today. Guide them and us to honor the promises they make today as we have honored the ones we made to them in their baptism. We pray for others who need to be part of this community and its ministry as we move forward. Some of them are among us and some are people we don't know yet. Help us to be open and welcoming to all who come here in search of you. We pray, too, O God for all the other things that any of us gathered here today need. Hear us as we talk with you here and beyond this place about them. And help us to mold what we think we need in response to your will and your call in our lives. Help us always to remember that your mercy is great, and that we have received it and that we are called to help others receive it too. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, who taught us all to pray together when he said: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen*