

You are filled!

Meditation on Acts 2:1-21

June 4, 2017

Pentecost at Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. *2* And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. *3* Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. *4* All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. *6* And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. *7* Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' *8* And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? *9* Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, *10* Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, *11* Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' *12* All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' *13* But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. *15* Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. *16* No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 "In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,

*in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.*
¹⁹ *And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.*
^{20s} *The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.*
²¹ *Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Dan Bowman, the son of American missionaries, was raised in Japan. I met him while he pastored two small, country churches in southwestern Minnesota. He was a local legend, admired as the man who "played the saw." How he could make beautiful hymns come out of an ordinary handsaw held between his knees and touched with a violin bow was a mystery to us all.

At one of our ministerium meetings, the Spirit spoke through Dan as he shared with us the ancient Japanese art of *kintsugi*, repairing broken pottery with a resin or glue mixed with silver or gold, thus highlighting and celebrating the broken places and at the very least, treating them as part of the history of the object, rather than something to disguise. The repaired pottery would then be more valuable than the original, before it was broken and mended with silver or gold.

This is so unlike modern Western or ancient Greek thinking that views perfection as the ideal for human bodies, art objects and material possessions. Our Western ideal, based on ancient, pagan Greek beliefs (not Christian!), sees imperfection--flaws or weaknesses-- as taking away from the value of a person or object. Brokenness, therefore, is

something that renders the item *worthless* and if the object were repaired, it would have much less value than the original. Here are more examples of *kintsugi*.

You know where I am going with this, right? I was feeling broken and thinking that brokenness was a bad thing until I listened to Dan's devotion about *kintsugi*. The Presbyterian church I was serving was going through a seemingly endless conflict over the placement of the communion table. I knew Jesus would be grieved over a church fighting about the table that is a reminder of His shed blood and broken body for our sakes and a symbol of our oneness in Him. I later learned that it was a fight they had been having for years before I arrived; it wasn't really about the table--but over which family had the power and authority to make decisions in the church. Looking back, I think the brokenness I felt was a good thing. It humbled me and made me realize, more and more, my own reliance on the Savior and need for God's grace and mercy, God's forgiveness and unconditional love.

The words of Psalm 51 come to mind, when the repentant writer asks the Lord to "create in him a clean heart." "For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

The church is not ours to make in our image or to keep as it has always been; it belongs to the Lord, and as Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Sometimes Christians lose their way; they forget to whom they belong and the reason for their existence. Ephesians 2:10 reminds us, "For we are

God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Pastor Dan understood my feeling of brokenness, for he had weathered conflict in one of his small, rural congregations, Rock Valle in Echo, in 2010. The church voted 34 to 31 to leave the ELCA when the denomination began permitting gay and lesbian pastors in committed relationships to serve its congregations. While the vote did not reach the required 2/3 majority, those who voted to leave the denomination left the church. Dan remained to pastor the 31 who stayed and comfort the grieving-- preaching hope and rebirth. But it was difficult. It led him to pray for the church every day, he said, and rely on his faith to see the way through it. Then, last July 23, Dan encountered another trial in ministry, when the larger church he pastors--Hawk Creek in Sacred Heart--was struck by lightning; the 140-year old building burned to the ground. But Dan saw God's providence at work, even as the fire burned. His mother prayed that the altar area would be spared as a witness to the world that God is still in charge. The altar was untouched. The congregation of 203 voted unanimously in January to rebuild. “How often do you get a unanimous vote with that many people?” he asks, in a *Star Tribune* article Jan. 29. “What this tells me is that this had to be led by the Holy Spirit.” They have been worshiping with, you guessed it, the little congregation at Rock Valle in Echo since the fire.

On the Day of Pentecost, a Jewish pilgrimage festival 50 days after Passover, Christ's followers gather for prayer in a house in Jerusalem. Hoping in Christ's promises, they seek the one who said in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you!" They obey his instructions in Luke 24:49, to gather, wait and pray in the city, until they are "clothed with power from on high." These 120 followers have seen "convincing proofs" of the risen Christ over a period of 40 days, learned about the kingdom of God and heard that they will "receive power when the Holy Spirit" comes upon them for a divine purpose. "You will be my witnesses," he says in Acts 1:8, "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The same Spirit that hovers over the dark waters of Creation in Gen. 1:1 and breathes life into human beings in Gen. 2:7 fills Christ's followers on Pentecost and stirs them to proclaim the gospel. The Spirit grants them the ability to speak in the native languages of the "devout Jews from every nation" living in Jerusalem, thus beginning the fulfillment of the promise that they would be Christ's witnesses--"to the ends of the earth." But all who hear the gospel in their language are not convinced. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they ask, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? And, "What does this mean?" Some sneer, "They are filled with new wine!"

Peter responds to the accusation of drunkenness by preaching his first sermon, beginning, as many modern preachers do, with a joke. "Indeed, *these* are not drunk, as you suppose," he says, "*for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.*" In other words, come back later. THEN you'll see

us drunk.

Much like Jesus' sermon in Nazareth, when he reads Isaiah and declares the scripture fulfilled, Peter quotes Joel, and declares prophecy fulfilled with the coming Spirit. He assures everyone that if they call upon the name of the Lord--cry out to him in prayer--they will be saved.

As I read through Peter's sermon that continues beyond our lectionary reading, I am struck by how confident and eloquent this uneducated fisherman has become. Is this the same Peter who sank into the sea for lack of faith when Christ beckoned him to walk on water with him? Is this Peter who denied Christ 3 times before the cock crowed, though he promised to lay down his life for him? This is he! But also the Peter to whom Jesus tells in Matthew 16:18, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church," confirming to us, yet again, that God uses broken vessels to accomplish His will. He uses flawed, imperfect people, but with hearts to love and serve him.

As the people hear Peter preach, they are "cut to the heart." They ask Peter and the other apostles what they should do. Peter answers in 2:38, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

I imagine Peter often experienced brokenness as he struggled to follow Christ, even after Pentecost, when he was empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the gospel--and 3,000 accepted Christ that day. I have come to believe that when we experience feelings of brokenness, it may actually be that the Spirit is at work in us, healing us, making us whole

and *complete in Him*.

Friends, we all have wounds of the heart and mind that God alone can repair. You are God's work of art, His *kintsugi*! Embrace and celebrate your broken places! For they are filled with something more precious than gold or silver! For you are filled with the Spirit! In your testimony of what the Lord has done for you, God's healing love will come shining through!

Let us pray. Holy One, thank you for your Spirit, which filled 120 followers on Pentecost and fills each one of us now. We ask that your Spirit would refresh and renew us, heal us and make us whole. Grant us peace, confidence and courage to proclaim your gospel right where we live, work and go to school. Empower us to take the Good News of your Son to the ends of the earth to which each of us has been sent. Change our hearts, Lord, so that we humbly obey your commands, repent from our sins of fear and doubt and take risks, giving generously from all the resources you have given us. Lead us to do things we might never have done before to reveal your love to one another and the world. We pray that you would add to the church in this place, Lord, as you did on the day of Pentecost! Use us broken vessels for your glory and to the praise of your holy name! In Christ we pray. Amen.