



*Here is the Pentecost sermon based on Acts 2:1-21 that I preached on June 9, 2019. I am so thankful for the collaboration and support of the community from the liturgical dancing and dove waving, music, choral reading, life-sharing, and celebration of different languages. We concluded the service with members leading the benediction in languages they know including Spanish, French, Korean, Japanese, and German.*

*Peace and blessings to you, Alice*

A little lending library just opened in the entryway of my daughter's preschool. I love it. On days when we don't have to get home right away, we stop and she pulls book after book for me to read. We read the first few pages and then she gets me another, and another and another.

Like a lot of the books we have back in the children's area here in the sanctuary, Through the humor of the familiar of mealtimes and bedtimes, and sometimes through the invitation to the serious, these books communicate that all are welcome, that the differences in our skin color and background are what bring beauty to this world, and that we must train ourselves to be attuned to one another.

This idea that beauty comes in diversity is center to the lived mission of the school. When my older son attended there, he learned to count to ten in Spanish and in Arabic before he could do so in English. Before he could be influenced by the awful stereotypes of this world, he understood the hijab to be a practice of faith to be admired and even inspirational. At 5 pm, coming in from traffic and facing the pressures of the dinner-prep witching hour, I'm so thankful that the school has created this little space for intentionality. It is a miracle of community that they have carved into our day.

On this day of Pentecost, we too in the church celebrate this miracle of community flung open by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we heard in the choral reading, the Holy Spirit comes in waves first seen then heard. The fiery tongues are turned into the gift of other tongues, and as Biblical Scholar William Willimon reflects,

the first gift of the Spirit is the gift of different languages creating an opportunity for proclamation.

It is in this moment that the gathered community is invited to take a risk — to venture from where they were hiding inside in that upper room to outside where the Gospel message is already drawing a crowd. Bystanders look on, and because there are no reasonable expectations for this sudden power of the spirit, they come with their own explanation: “They have drunk too much wine.” It is a moment of holy spirit humor pointing us towards times when we come up with non-sensical explanations for things that we don’t understand. But as we well know this kind of fearful attitude towards things we don’t understand also has the potential to turn fatally dangerous.

As we in this country and those in the Europe celebrated the anniversary of D Day, we were reminded how fear turned to fascism — and then to nazism leading our world to seeing some of the worst evils ever perpetrated.

For the millions of Jewish people and many others who were killed, we did not act soon enough. It is a sin that we as a world will forever have to atone for. But when we finally did come together I am reminded too of the bravery of so many from all religions and all backgrounds facing down that evil.

As a nation, we are the most divided we have been in my lifetime and perhaps yours as well. The left demonizes the right and the right the left. When we so desperately need the work of immigrants in this country, we hear the horrifying messages calling immigrants all sorts of horrible names, hear of children in detention facilities that have been compared to a prison, kindergartners having to defend themselves without a lawyer, and funding that provide for English lessons have been cut.

The immigrants I know are the ones who take the jobs in the chicken factories in Kentucky because no one else wants those jobs, the people who work 15 hour days in the California and Texas sun picking our crops, the mothers who carry a young child strapped to their back while dropping another off at school, my children's’ pediatrician, the owner of my favorite coffee shop, and one of my favorite college professors.

Our soundbite world has trained us into giving way to stereotypes. It is deepest calling of the church to stand firm against the way we are becoming every so further divided, for it is this division that is tearing not only our country but our very souls apart. We can’t give way to the divisions, white vs. black; immigrant vs. citizen, rural vs. urban.

My assumption about rural communities were deeply challenged this past February as I drove from here to rural Indiana for my dear friend Amy’s memorial service. On the drive, I took the opportunity to grieve the death of my friend and to take in a part of the country that only living on either coast, I have never seen before. I got off the highway and drove through towns where houses seemed to have given way to disrepair, a clear result of so few businesses left. The opioid epidemic in rural America came clearly into view.

I turned on talk radio and the broadcaster was spouting the same message we hear from some on cable media — in order to protect yourself, stick with your tribe; don't let foreigners in.

When I arrived in their small town, I girded myself for the feeling of tribalism and xenophobia spouted out on cable radio. But that wasn't the case at all. The downtown was bustling on that Thursday evening with food trucks camped out for those who came for Trivia night. The whole community was out.

As I looked deeper, on the hotel, on the coffee shop, on the court building, and on neighboring churches were signs celebrating Amy's memory. The whole town was showing up in support.

Still hesitant, I looked around and noticed that most of the population was white, so I thought maybe this is how they show up for those who look like the majority — for those in the tribe.

The next day, my stereotypes continued to be challenged. First off, I didn't expect many of Amy's out of town friends to be people of color. And then at the reception, I didn't expect to see a friendly intermingling prompted by the people of the church and community who created intentional spaces for introduction and inclusion.

I dug in later with Amy's husband, who is the Pastor of the Presbyterian church in town and a local civic leader. He said he well knows the stereotypes, and believes that it is the calling of the church to defy those things. The children's section in his church is full of the same kinds of books we have here and at my children's preschool. He preaches on and prays over privilege and racism. The church works to support local businesses so that the downtown may thrive.

The devastating thing is indeed the opioids epidemic, especially among older youth and young adults. It was the work of my friend as the local judge, and the work of the local faith community working together to provide for teen outreach, support, and ultimately hope. They want to create a community where every voice is heard and where those in pain will realize that they are not alone. Here is the hope of Gospel.

The Pentecost story is often contrasted with the ancient Babel story that Sam read. As Biblical scholar Ted Heibert offers, God's problem with the Tower of Babel was not about human pride but rather about cultural homogeneity. In the Babel story, the threat to humanity comes when the people want to live in one place and be a uniform culture. God, intervenes against this false sense of human intent and scatters the people throughout the world creating multiple languages and perspectives. Diversity is God's intention for this world.

We are intentionally trying to embody this kind of diversity here at NYAPC. You'll notice in your bulletins there is an insert to the new Vision and Mission that the Vision Strategy group has been working on for over a year now. At the heart of the vision is the hope of inclusion that comes from a deep embrace of diversity. Our hope is not just about general message of welcome. Our hope is that inclusion takes root in the specificity of human relationships: That those with power of the microphone and status will take time for deep relational listening; That those who come from other parts of the world will speak and the rest of us will listen so that can blow change amongst us; That we will listen to the leadership of our children and youth that from

caring for the diversity of creation to embracing the diversity of humanity we might work toward kingdom of God made manifest in this world.

We are indeed in a very scary time in our country and in our world. I deeply believe the Holy Spirit is moving in and through us at NYAPC preparing us to be repairers of the breach.

Think our location just a few blocks from the seat of power, the thousands of people literally from all backgrounds who either pass by our front door or come inside each day.

Think of the groups who already feel comfortable in our building from the Poor People's Campaign, to the McClendon Scholar in Residence programs talked where Senator Coons talked and both progressives and conservatives responded, to different groups advocating for those who live without homes feel.

You come from different places city and rural, from DC and not, those born here and those who bring another culture. You come from diverse perspectives. You are willing to have our minds changed about how given the right push — perhaps a personal story, you are willing to turn away from stereotypes.

Then think of this building, particularly Peter Marshall Hall, proudly reflecting the work of Community Club and the McClendon Mental Health Program on its walls. Consider how we could be the perfect space for continuing to host intentional conversations with those who in the eyes of the world are so different, yet in the heart of God are loved just the same.

We would start with the things we have in common, our love of our kids, our love of our work, maybe in a shared passion for baseball - always beginning from the fundamental place that God creates us good. We could take a cue from Krista Tippet's On Being podcast and then dig deeper the question "what is the spiritual background of your childhood?" It is a question meant to get us thinking to who we are, who the other person is, and whose we are together. We would begin the conversations with the premise that each person is good and beloved child of God. And then and only when those abiding relationships are established would we dig directly into the places of conflict that tear us apart. Given the right atmosphere, ground rules of openness, honesty and hospitality, these kind of civil conversations would go a long ways towards the healing of our country and the healing of our very souls.

Following after our deep conviction that it is our calling to follow God into places of brokenness and joy, to express God's love, to engage in God's justice, it is our calling to be that miracle of community for the world.

Do you feel the power of the Spirit blowing through this place?

I do.

Amen.