

Acts 2:1-21 Pastor Bill Uetracht Pentecost 6/4/17

This past week I met with a couple who is about to get married. In our meeting, it became quite clear that she and he were somewhat different in their approaches to living. She wants to make sure that life is ordered, that some of the wildness and unpredictability of life is kept in check. He likes the adventurous, the potentially dangerous, perhaps a little more of the chaotic. A motorcycle would be really fun to him. It's the last thing in life that she wants to see him or them own.

I've got to ask you today. Is it about order, safety, comfort? Or is it all about wildness, unpredictability, chaos, challenge? Well, I will answer that question as I often answer such questions: "Yes!"

Today on Pentecost Sunday we encounter Biblical readings through which we are placed in the midst of a great tension. On the one hand in these readings, we confront a Spirit who brings us comfort and orders life. And yet on the other hand, we meet a Spirit who is wild, somewhat dangerous, not overly predictable, a bringer of what appears to be chaos. The experience with God is an experience of order **and** danger.

Let's start with the order, the comfort. Our Psalm for today is one that Walter Brueggemann labels a "song of orientation." In this kind of song, life is orderly. Life is good. The created world is majestic, filled with God's glory, just as it ought to be. You sing this kind of song when the temperature is about 75 degrees; Lake Michigan is as calm as it can be; the kids are behaving, are fun and even cute; the bike ride is unimpeded because the wind is not blowing, the rain is not falling, and the potholes have been repaired. It's all good, and you want to join old Satchmo Armstrong and sing: "And I think to myself; what a wonderful world!"

"Manifold your works, O God of might. Maker of the earth, the air, the light. Waters great and wide and all therein, creatures that abide, let life begin! When we look to you to give us food, you open

your hand, fill us with good. You provide. Food happens. We have what we need. It is all wonderful.”

Those of you who follow me on Facebook will recall that this past week I posted something about food that I ate. (It’s very unusual that I would do something like this.) On my bike ride on Thursday I stopped at The Deck, which is at Pere Marquette Beach, for dinner, only to be blown away by the Brussel sprout, hummus, and guacamole tacos that they served me. Sitting there, having been nourished by *good* food that had been given me in due season, surrounded by a beautiful beach, and warmed by the sun and cloudless sky, I felt that life really was in order. “What a wonderful world!” I wanted to sing.

In a portion of the Psalm that we didn’t sing today, the Psalm writer, as if she were sitting on the shores of Lake Michigan (or more likely the Mediterranean Sea), says: “Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things are innumerable there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.”

Leviathan is a big sea monster, a massive animal found in the water. Often, Leviathan is pictured as a worker of chaos, associated with the evil and that which destroys. Here in Psalm 104, Leviathan is just a big, fat animal that God loved to create, just for the fun of it, just because he could, just because God loves creation, sees it as a playground. “What a wonderful world!”

Graduates, everybody else, you’ve got to know this. There is something about life that is wondrous. There is something about life right here, right now, that is filled with wonder, glory, majesty. There is an order to life that you can depend on, that can give you direction for life, that can prevent you from giving up on life, throwing in the towel. Open yourself to that order. Discover it in the romping of your dog, the dew on the grass, the pristine beauty of the Lake, the quiet cricket song on a summer night, the light breathing of your grandson as he sleeps on your chest, Brussel sprout tacos, a cold beer at the brewery, a bike ride on the new trail, the authentic folk music of Ruth and Max Bloomquist,

the enlivening jazz of Edye Evans-Hyde, the pulsating rhythms of the West Side Soul Surfers. It's all good. "What a wonderful world."

Now, you need to know, the Psalm writer would say, all of this comes as gift. It's not a matter of your manufacturing. "When you, O God, send forth your Spirit," the Psalm writer says, "[everything is] created; you renew the face of the ground. But when you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust."

Life is dependent. You are dependent. Life comes as a gift from the Spirit, the breath of life. To live trusting something else is not wise. To live thinking that it is all your due is stupidity. The Spirit blows and there is life. But when the Spirit stops blowing, we return to the dust. That's part of the order. Initially, that sounds like news that makes us uncomfortable, but it awakens us to the glory of the present moment, breathed into our lives, by the Breath of Life. "What a wonderful world."

Life with God is one of order. It's life that brings comfort and joy. The Spirit settles life, calms it, orders it.

But you can't stop there. Life with God unsettles us. Life with God brings discomfort. Life with God is dangerous.

You find yourself sitting at a great party—a party called Pentecost that celebrates that once again food has been given to you in due season, that you are a part of the marvelous ordering tradition known as the Law. It's all good. It's all orderly. "What a wonderful world!" And then, you must hold on to your seats. The lid is being blown off of your little world. The wind of the Spirit blows, makes a major noise, filling the room that you are in with its loud sound (trumpet played). And then what appears to be tongues of fire descend upon all of you (organ played). And then you begin to speak languages that are not your own. "Unasema Kiswahili! Vous parlez francais! Habalan espanol!"

It's all very amazing. It's all phenomenally unsettling. It's all chaotic. There are people at this party in Jerusalem, your fellow Jews,

who have moved there from all kinds of lands. Immigrants from all over the world are there. They are a part of your religion, but they are not from your ethnic background. They are from different lands, different tribes. They may even speak different languages. But today, they hear the story—the story of Jesus, the story of his death, his resurrection—in their own language. Today, although you are remarkably different, you are united. You are woven together by the Wind of God, who blows so that the story of Jesus, a story of God's deep love, compassion, and forgiveness, shapes who you are and weaves you together with all kinds of different folks.

You are so worked up by the blowing of this Spirit that you appear weird to other people, appear to be a part of a chaotic drunken people. "You are filled with new, strong wine," they say about you. But no, you aren't drunk. The dangerous Spirit of God is blowing in your midst, and your whole world is being turned upside. Peter says that's what happens when the Spirit blows; the world is transformed. Wild things happen. Men **and believe it or not**, women, begin to prophesy. Even the discounted young men see visions. And the old men who have no reason to dream dreams dream dreams. And even the natural world participates in the transformation. The sun turns to darkness; the mood turns to blood. To encounter the Spirit of God is to be brought into a wild world, a seemingly chaotic world, a dangerous world.

Yes, the experience with God is a world-ordering experience. Yes, it brings deep comfort. Yes, it is a "wonderful world." But it, too, is a wild and dangerous world. To encounter the Spirit of God means that you cannot be the same again, the world cannot be the same again. To meet the Spirit of God is to be brought into the wild place where the unexpected happens: men and women, old people and young people are brought together and valued equally. To meet the Spirit of God is to encounter the Energy of life that is not satisfied with life as it is, that moves so that we might dream new dreams, create new possibilities, tear down old walls.

The blowing, fire-producing Spirit of God unsettles, is dangerous to settled lives. The Spirit is dangerous to the status quo, dangerous to lives that are turned in on themselves, dangerous to the kinds of tribalism that we naturally like to live within—you know, my family first, my group first, my nation first. When the Spirit blows, our tribes are seen for what they are: helpful means to negotiate life in some orderly way, but not definitional for what it means to be human. When the Spirit blows we are moved beyond our little tribes to experience life as a communion with others, a communion that includes the whole world. When the Spirit blows, true community is born, community that can comfort us, but also community that sometimes will challenge everything that we have known and held dear.

So! What do you say to the couple who finds that they are living with different expectations about life? Is life about order and comfort? Or is it about wildness, danger, unsettledness? Yes, with the Spirit of God, it is!