

Sermon – Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, 25-27

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Pentecost – Year C

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“Dreaming with the Spirit”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit breathed out upon all flesh. Amen.

1. Not long ago, *The Washington Post* conducted a survey to discover what Americans are afraid of these days. Perhaps unsurprisingly, public speaking topped the list, with 25.3% claiming this phobia. Standing up here in front of all of you, I know how these folks feel! The top ten list was rounded out by, in descending order, the fears of heights, bugs and snakes, drowning, blood and needles, enclosed spaces, flying, strangers, zombies, darkness, clowns, and ghosts. Having read this list, I found myself with a newly developed fear of zombie clowns attacking me with spiders and needles in the dark while trapped in a small plane, high above the earth. Terrifying, indeed. I could add my own fear: Will we make budget here at Grace? Well, you know how to solve that problem! Anyway, while many of us suffer from one phobia or another, I would hazard a guess that most of our fears run deeper, and in a more existential direction. Am I good enough? Will my mistakes come back to haunt me? Does anyone actually love me for who I am? Am I alone in this journey through life?
2. On the night before Jesus’ death, his friends were gathered in the upper room, afraid. What was coming was finally clear: Jesus was going away. His betrayal was underway and the cross, with its suffering and shame, was looming on the horizon. Thomas has already admitted his fears, confessing that he doesn’t know where Jesus is going. And while Jesus responds with words of promise, assuring his friends that he is the way, the truth, and the

- life, their fears have not been assuaged. Philip speaks up: “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Okay, Jesus, go ahead and go, but just let us see God clearly and we know everything will be alright. I think we know how Philip feels. If we could just see behind the veil, have the curtain drawn back and the mysteries of the universe revealed, we’d be able to deal with it all. Perhaps, like Moses long ago, we could climb the mountain and get the glimpse we need. Jesus, however, offers no such promise. He is going away. But he will not leave his friends orphaned. No, another will come.
3. One of my joys in recent weeks has been hearing our graduating seniors announce where they’ll be headed in the fall, as high school ends and this thing we call adulthood begins to take shape. I recall my own transition to college. My parents drove me a thousand miles from home to my new campus. And while I was excited and in so many ways ready for this next phase of life, I was also fearful. I didn’t know a soul there. Would I fit in, make friends, do well in my classes? My parents couldn’t do anything for me in these areas (and no, they never harassed a professor for giving me a low grade well earned), but they could point me in the right direction. The last memory I have before they hopped back in the minivan to return to Wisconsin is of them walking with me to the local Lutheran church and reminding me that I had a home there. And while I confess that my worship attendance was spotty at best for the first few years, the point was clear: even though I was leaving home, I was not homeless, and there was a community waiting to welcome me in.
 4. Jesus is preparing to depart, first to the cross, then from the bonds of death, and finally to his Father’s right hand, but he is not leaving his friends homeless, orphaned and alone. Instead, the Father will send another in Jesus’ name, an Advocate and Comforter, to remind us of all that Jesus has taught, the very Holy Spirit in which Jesus baptizes us and welcomes us in – to grace and forgiveness, to love and to life, to our family as children of God. Paul

writes to the Romans, “you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father! It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Yes, we have fears. Yes, there are turning points in our lives that bring uncertainty. But you are not alone, for in the Spirit’s presence, Jesus is with you always. And in Jesus, you are not alone, for we are now and always together in Christ, a new family bought and brought together by the gift of his body and blood for all people.

5. This promise of the outpouring of the Spirit comes in fullness on the day of Pentecost, which begins with the disciples still huddled and fearful behind closed doors. The day is significant. Pentecost, for the people of God, marked the celebration of Moses’ ascent of Sinai to receive the law, fifty days after the first Passover that brought them deliverance from bondage and death in Egypt. But now, fifty days after Jesus Christ, God’s new Passover Lamb, was raised from the dead, we see God do a new thing. Instead of bringing one person as a representative into the divine presence atop a mountain, God comes down directly to be poured out upon all people, of all nations and languages. Instead of giving a new set of laws, God in the Spirit brings true freedom – from sin, from death, from evil, from fear. In the sending of the Spirit, God frees Jesus’ friends to abandon their fears and go boldly into the city, preaching the gospel of Jesus, the promise of the God who in dying and rising has set us free. We are the ones, marked with the cross of Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit, who are called. Called to be with Jesus wherever we are, for he is there with us; called to let go of our fears, for they are left in the tomb; called to speak words of grace and hope and peace to all people, for all people are God’s beloved, too. There is no longer any need for us to say with Philip, “Show us the Father.” If you have seen Jesus, crucified and raised, you have seen the Father. And if the Spirit has been given, you have seen Jesus. God in Christ through the Spirit has shown us everything we need. What then shall we fear? You are seen. You are known. You are loved. You are forgiven.

- Jesus has made this true for us, and the Spirit calls us back to Jesus again and again that we may hear and know that this is true for us, for you and for all people, without reservation or hesitation, for all people who call upon the name of the Lord.
6. Peter, in his sermon on that Pentecost long ago, preached on the prophet Joel, announcing what God has long intended: that the Holy Spirit would come, bringing new dreams and visions to old and young, women and men, slave and free alike. Even and especially to the ones the world considers least and lowest, even to these is the Spirit given in equal measure, that together we can envision God's kingdom and dream God's dream. A dream in which we are driven by hope instead of fear, by love instead of hate; a kingdom that continually moves the message of the cross of Christ – and his commandment to love – to every nook and cranny of this world. To all who would wield fear as their weapon, their day is over, even if those running for office want you to believe otherwise. To all who live in fear, new hope has come, for you are not orphaned or alone. You are not left beneath or behind. Your home is here as, together in the Spirit, as sisters and brothers of Jesus, we cry out Abba, Father, and hear words of welcome and assurance, of forgiveness and new life. We hear words of sending, too, as ones without fear who go forth to love. All of us, young and old, women and men. And don't worry if you don't feel quite up to the task. Neither did Peter, or Philip, or Thomas. But the Spirit has other ideas, dreams and visions that won't be undone by our fears. As Nate Frambach of Wartburg Seminary likes to say, "If you're breathing, you're gifted – If you're baptized, you're authorized."
 7. The work of Pentecost continues, calling us over and again back home to Jesus, sending us forth over and again to announce a kingdom in which fear is no more. What does Pentecost look like? A lot like it did on that Pentecost so many years ago, when tongues of fire emerged and all heard God's promises in their own language. The fire still burns, and ears still long to hear the grace

that casts out fear – even, I suppose, if zombie clowns show up. For Jesus lives, the Spirit is loosed, and God’s kingdom continues to grow with peace and love, with forgiveness and joy, with life beyond death. Let go of your fears, give them to Jesus, and dream in the Spirit the vision for all people that knows no end.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit!