

Sermon – John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-21
David R. Lyle
Grace Lutheran Church
Pentecost – Year B
19 May 2024

“A Transformational Conflagration”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I am, for many reasons, grateful to my high school choir director, Mr. Meidl. In the choir room at Appleton West, I learned to understand and appreciate baroque choral music. I discovered the thrilling joy of improvisational vocal jazz. It was in that room that I sort of found my people, and in finding them found myself. But there’s one thing he said that will always stick with me. He called me into his office one day during my senior year and said, “David, it’s been fun to watch you come out of your shell this year.” He paused, looking at me, before continuing: “Would you go back in a little bit?”
2. Fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, and ten days after his ascension, the apostles remain cooped up, all together in one place, waiting for God to act. Perhaps there is no one among them less likely to emerge from his shell than Peter. So often during Jesus’ ministry, Peter eagerly tried to get it right. So often, he got it wrong. His sin and shame calcified on the night of Jesus’ betrayal with his own denial of even knowing Jesus, let alone being one of his closest friends and followers. By this point in the story, the risen Christ has forgiven Peter, but surely, he will proceed with reticence and caution.
3. If you’ll pardon a bit more autobiography, there was a reason I’d been in a shell to begin with. From the time I began to speak, I did so with a speech impediment that made it very difficult for others to understand what I was

saying. It made me sound unintelligent; it got me teased. I grew to deeply dislike my voice. Keeping quiet and to myself became the path of least resistance. I will be forever grateful to those who came alongside me, beginning with Ms. Jenson, the speech therapist who worked from me from the ages of three to thirteen, who quite literally helped me find my voice. And Mr. Meidl, too, because when it's difficult to speak your own words alone, it is a powerful joy to sing someone else's words together with others. And now I just won't be quiet, will I?

4. Pentecost is about finding our voice, of receiving the power from on high to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Sure, it's about hearing, too, each in our own language. It's about God's reversal of the dispersal and confusion brought on by human rebellion at Babel, which God does without flattening out the differences between us. We still speak in our own language, live from our own vantage point, but the cacophony of division becomes a symphony of diversity under God's baton. But still, for any of us to hear, we need to speak. So, the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, now falls upon the believers. On this festival long celebrated as the day on which God gave the Law upon Mount Sinai, God now gives Godself to God's people. Fire rests upon them and a violent wind propels them out of hiding, into the streets, with Peter – of all people – at the forefront. The preacher Will Willimon writes, “The Spirit is the power which enables the church to ‘go public’ with its good news, to attract a crowd and . . . have something to say worth hearing.”
5. The Holy Spirit comes to you this day, too. In your sorrows, just as Jesus spoke to the sorrowing disciples in the Upper Room before his death. The Spirit comes to you in your weakness, in those moments where you can't even find words to pray. The Spirit comes upon this whole broken creation, groaning under the weight of human sin, giving hope even now. The Spirit comes, as always, to connect you again to the saving work of Christ, the One

who has won victory over sin, death, and the devil. And the Spirit sends you forth to speak, emerging into the world the gospel that is this world's hope.

6. This morning, we'll see the Holy Spirit fall upon Evelyn Diane in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and we'll have the joy of hearing her find her voice as she grows. This morning, we'll hear new members give voice to their commitment to the ministry we share, and we'll speak words of welcome and blessing in return. In fact, the Spirit has so much to do today that I think I'll just go ahead and wrap this up and sit on down. May you hear the Spirit speaking: Christ who was dead is alive. You who were dead are alive. The Spirit lives in you. Go forth with joy in your heart and God's gospel upon your lips. Use your voice, Church, and proclaim the good news of God's ever-expanding dream. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit!

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.