

Sermon – John 14:8-17, 25-27; Acts 2:1-21
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 Grace Lutheran Church
 Pentecost – Year C
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“More Than You Asked For”

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. Our eldest child is, as of a week ago, a junior in high school. Which is, of course, impossible, but here we are. This means that it is time to begin dreaming about what comes *after* high school. For Greta, the likely answer is college, but that only leads to another question: Which one? Needing to start somewhere, she and I visited Georgetown a few months ago. Not because she is necessarily interested, but because we were in Washington, D.C., anyway. The official portion of the visit began in a packed auditorium. As I sat there, learning about the university, it became clear to me: I don't have any idea how to do this, or how to advise Greta. By the end of the day, I knew a lot about Georgetown, but what I really learned was how little I know navigating this process. Turns out I still have a lot to learn.

2. We are an impatient people. We want to know, to see, right away. So it is for Philip and his friends on that Thursday night in the Upper Room. “Show us the Father,” he asks, and they will be satisfied. Philip, perhaps, still thinks there is some way out of this other than the cross. Just bring us into God's glory now, Jesus! But Jesus is unwavering, face set. He is going to the cross, because it is precisely there that God's glory will shine forth in the darkness, precisely for this that the Son was sent. But the cross will not be the end. Here, on the 50th day of Easter, our Alleluias still echo. But wait, *there's more!* Greater things will come; deeper truths will be taught. And all this will

happen when the Spirit – Advocate, Counselor, Comforter – comes. Turns out the disciples still have a lot to learn. And so, of course, do we.

3. And when the Holy Spirit comes, the doors are blown off. This small band of disciples – hiding, waiting, holding their breath – is propelled into the open. Rushing wind, flaming fire, the very Spirit of the living God falling upon human flesh – men and women, young and old. Peter casts a vision, preaches the word, and 3,000 are brought into the community of believers. In a sign of what is to unfold throughout the Book of Acts and ever since, these new believers are not who you'd expect. They come from the ends of the known earth, both Jews and proselytes. The barriers will fall throughout Acts as it becomes clear that God intends the death and resurrection of the Son to be the salvation of all people, and the Spirit comes to push the boundaries ever and again beyond where we would foolishly place them, thinking, "Surely, God would not go there. Surely, God would not choose them." And then the Spirit leads us exactly there, exactly to them. Which is why, of course, this month of Pride is so important for the church, we who were once so certain that there wasn't room in the Kingdom for our LGBTQ siblings. But the Spirit keeps pushing, opening eyes, welcoming all. The Spirit keeps leading us into truth.

4. Sometimes I buy books with great intentionality. Other times, not so much. Sometimes, it might just be because there's a cute picture of a monkey on the cover. So it was that I not too long ago picked up a volume of short stories by Haruki Murakami. The first story, "Cream," tells of a young man at a bit of a crossroads in life who encounters an older man who appears, it seems, out of nowhere. The older man tells the younger man that the key to discovering the essence of life is to picture a circle with many centers but no circumference. Whis is, of course, absurd. A circle is nothing other than a circumference and a single center. To say anything else is nonsense, and the young man is left to grapple with this as the older man vanishes. Nonsense,

but maybe it's good theology. I have no reason to believe that this is what Murakami intends, but on this Feast of Pentecost, I wonder if maybe this is an apt image of God's reign, this circle with many centers but no circumference. To be sure, Christ is the center, but in his ascension and by the work and witness of the Spirit, he plays in ten thousand places at once. And around this manifold-singular center, the Spirit pushes the circle beyond any circumference, until nothing short of the whole cosmos is included in the redeeming grace of our God.

5. Within this circle there is still suffering. Paul, who would be claimed by Christ not long after Pentecost, is clear about this. To know that we are God's children is to know suffering in the meantime. Goodness knows there is no shortage to our suffering, to creation's groaning. But the Spirit points to that which the world and its powers do not want us to see. The Spirit points to hope. There have been few prophets of hope in recent times more powerful than Walter Brueggemann, a hugely influential theologian and biblical scholar. Dr. Brueggemann died this week, but his work lives on. I cannot think of many books more read by seminarians across denominations in the past fifty years than his *The Prophetic Imagination*. Here, he writes, "Hope, on the one hand, is an absurdity too embarrassing to speak about, for it flies in the face of all those claims we have been told are facts. Hope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion; and one does that only at great political and existential risk. On the other hand," he continues, "hope is subversive, for it limits the grandiose pretension of the present." Penned in 1978, these words are timeless. The present is nothing if not pretentious and grandiose. But the present is not the end. The present will ultimately collapse under its own self-importance, while the ever-expanding future of our God continues to unfold, beckoning us ever and again out of death and into life, into hope.

6. There is so much we wish to know, to see. But instead of instant knowledge, we are given a loving companion, the very presence of God poured out as Holy Spirit. Connected to the unchanging life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Spirit propels us into a future beyond our imagining. A future of knowing and being known by the God of glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A future without bounds, encompassing all. 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.