

Recovering the Weird

John 14:18-27, Acts 2:1-21

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

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"I do not give to you as the world gives." Do you hear that? Jesus has been preparing his disciples for his death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Spirit. He promises they will not be "orphaned," without family. He promises the Spirit will bring peace to them, but that they might be afraid. Then, he tries to prepare them for something weird coming, "I give you peace, but I do not give to you as the world gives."

Something different than what is normal activity for "the world" is coming.

And, oh my yes, something different came!

Wind! Fired-up disciples! People who spoke maybe two languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) now seemed to be able to speak in Arabic and Greek and Parthian and Latin and who knows what all those other folk spoke!

Eleven people who had cowered in fear now shouted to strangers on the patio of the house about the mighty acts of God they had witnessed! Peter, who had not long ago denied even knowing Jesus, now makes this edgy speech, speaking difficult truths, calling people to account, saying that God is doing something powerful and disruptive, even cosmic and apocalyptic in nature! This isn't just some emotional revival; there is deep content to the words they are speaking and a life-changing response is called for. The disciples seemed so strange that some thought they must be drunk, for who acts like that in public if they're not? They looked and sounded ridiculous, perhaps; decidedly edgy, electric in their ability to attract a crowd. The message had urgency! And it was directed not just at

the locals, but at people from all over their known world who were in the city for a festival. Big, not small. Powerful, not weak. Loud, not soft.

You can understand why Jesus encouraged them not to be afraid, because what they found themselves able to do beyond their capacity must have been frightening. The Holy Spirit can be comforter, but also challenger and unsetler and agitator, and the part of God that fires up people when they need to be fired up. A bit unpredictable; I don't think the disciples got a text saying that the coming of the Spirit was happening on the holy day of Pentecost, so they should add it to their calendar. The Spirit came, and Jesus had done the preparing. The Spirit came, and they were willing to receive and act with the Spirit in the moment, not blocking her out of fear.

From that day forward, forward through millennia, the community of Christians, of those who heard the good news and responded to it with their hearts, souls, minds and strength, has grown exponentially.

And yet, the original reason that both the disciples and those who heard them responded to this message still exists. The world is not as it should be. There is something in each of our lives, and in the world around us, that feels profoundly out of whack in terms of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. The Holy Spirit still moves, though, in those who are open to receiving it. Those who receive strive in the way they move in the world to weave their being and God's deep, yearning love to create a world whose moral compass is love, together. As Bishop Curry put it in his wedding sermon yesterday, "Imagine this tired old world when love is the way." Those who are Spirit-filled imagine and live as though love IS the way.

To many in the world, including many who identify as Christians, this seems weird, strange, ridiculous, something drunk people, people not really in touch with the realities of life, would aspire to. Today, just as it was then.

The work of Pentecost continues. The Holy Spirit pushes and prods her way trying to weird us up, fire us up, blow us away, love us into love,

today as then. The Spirit is the living, dynamic Kingdom of God moving around, trying to get us into the program. Every. Single. Day.

Let me tell you what I am going to do right now. Because I am feeling weird. I'm going to walk out that door and stand on our steps and shout as loud as I can that everyone who can hear me is loved by God and called to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Because I can't imagine any human being on earth right now who doesn't need to hear that. You can come if you want. I'll be back in a few minutes, I think.

What I just did is not normal for us at Center Church. "I do not give to you as the world gives." Let us live into imagining what can be in this tired old world **when** – not if – love is the way. Amen.