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There is a beautiful Episcopal hymn that opens with some very misleading words describing the activity of the Holy Spirit of God: “Like the murmur of the dove’s song, like the challenge of her flight...”. Here is the sweet, sweet, Spirit, as sweet as the barely audible call of that most innocuous of birds, the dove. Gentle and soft, so mild, inoffensive—harmless really. Preachers love to equate it with that still, small voice of the King James version when the prophet Elijah hears God’s voice calling to him. Can you hear it? No? Don’t worry, it’s no big deal.

But today is the day when the disciples are gathered and having a perfectly nice, quiet, orderly meeting--until Jesus shows up, and somebody says, “I smell smoke!” Here is a spiritual experience that has nothing interior, private, or contemplative about it. There is nothing still or small about what happens. This is no inner voice of human intuition, some imagined feeling of right and wrong. Everything in the story from Acts is wind and fire, loud talk, buzzing confusion, public debate. This is external, outside of the self, a power that enters in ready or not, like it or not, and has its way with you. In the disciples’ case it literally in-spires them, breathes through them like wind and burns in them like fire, filling them with power to go public about Jesus of Nazareth: the Jew who lived briefly, died violently, and rose unexpectedly—that’s what they’ve got, and that’s what we’ve got!

This is still Easter, the fiftieth day of that season that begins with those shocking characters who interrupt a perfectly good cry, terrify the women at the tomb, and then harshly interrogate them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? Don’t you know? Don’t you remember? He is not here, but has risen.”

It’s so abrupt, this Easter resurrection business, this Pentecost Spirit business. But come to think of it, it’s not so unlike the man Jesus. As the preacher Will Willimon recently said, “God is a young adult...he just shows up: never invited anywhere, but he goes anyway; goes to parties, stays up too late, perpetual road trip to God knows where; real trouble with his family; calls attention to all the mistakes of the older generation.” This is true for the Holy Spirit too: “God as a young adult: strangely threatening but always unarmed, never stops anywhere long, walks too fast, bad boundaries spitting and sticking his fingers in their ears and touching and caressing, refuses to discriminate; passionate, intense, wants to make you careless. The book of Hebrews says “In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,” but God a young adult, and from the Middle East—people his age called the most dangerous group in our society. Why wasn’t God just a bit more mature, more settled in and settled down, nice middle of the road minivan like mine? Why isn’t the Spirit just a bit tamer, turn down the volume, turn down the burner in the kitchen—dial back all this intensity? It turns out that whether it is Jesus, God, or Spirit, the God we get may not be the God we thought we wanted.

The way Acts has it, the Holy Spirit is God filling this little group and making them something called the church. Before they were just a group of people. Forget when two or three are gathered, that great prayer of Chrysostom—two or three were gathered and nothing happened until God broke

in. According to Acts it is not people who make up the church, not a building that makes the church; it is God's Holy Spirit breaking in, disrupting, disorienting, and reorienting the life of a community. Wherever the Spirit is, there is the Church. You can have the biggest megachurch in the world, but if there is no Spirit, it's just mega.

So Pentecost is a creation story: the Spirit of God is a creative force that brings to life a peculiar new community. The Word that was in the beginning, the Word that was with God, the Word that was God, the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus, the Word that was killed on a cross and then rose powerfully, dramatically from the dead—this creative Word of God is now made flesh in a body of people, a community called the church. God has brought a new thing into being, a new life has been born because God has made it so.

According to the Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman, our modern narrative that goes unspoken and undisputed is the notion of self-invention in the pursuit of self-sufficiency. We are sold a story of identity that says we can create ourselves and sustain ourselves—it's all up to us. This joins with the notion of competitive productivity, and is motivated by pervasive anxiety about having enough, being enough, and being in control.

But the story of Acts calls all this into question. The disciples are gathered and waiting for God to act as God promised God would. At the end of Luke's Gospel, chapter 24 verse 49, the risen Christ tells them, "See, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." So they stay and wait, and God is faithful to God's promise. They are clothed with power. It turns out that in the life of faith, newness is a gift you can count on, a gift promised by God and given by God.

The second part of Pentecost is the gift of speech that comes to the disciples. Those who were silenced now speak, they speak truthfully. For me this is the greatest and most powerful gift of the spirit: the ability to speak the truth. We live in a culture that gives lots of half-truths and sells non-truths in damaging ways. The ancient words of wisdom on my Yogi green tea says, "Be kind and compassionate and the whole world will be your friend," but that's just not true, and we know it. Be kind and compassionate and get stepped on sometimes, get ignored other times. Jesus was kind and compassionate and there for some reason it made most people just want to kill him. Here is the truth, and I quote from theologian Stanley Hauerwas: "What we do when we educate kids to be happy and self-fulfilled is to absolutely ruin them. Parents should say to their kids, 'What you want out of life is not happiness but to be part of a worthy adventure. You want to have something worth dying for, because it's awful when all we have to live for is ourselves; that's what the Gospel reveals to us.'"

Last part of Holy Spirit power at Pentecost is God's call. I don't know the specifics of God's call for each of you, but I know this from Acts: a group of people who were scared to death become death-defying preachers of God's grace and truth, and change the world. Peter the Christ-denier becomes Peter the rock of the Church. Saul the Christ-hater becomes Paul the greatest Apostle in history. God takes all of who we are and all of who we are not, all of our strengths and all of our weaknesses—and makes something powerful with it, something we never before could have imagined. When God gets involved in your life, watch out, the wind blows and the fire burns, and you will never be the same.