

I Have Many Things to Say

Pentecost Sunday

May 24, 2015

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Texts: Acts 2.1-21;
Psalm 104;
Romans 8.22-27;
John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15

What a tender moment this is between Jesus and his disciples in John's gospel. This is just before the events of Holy Week. Jesus knows that everything that is to come will leave them troubled and disoriented. And so he tries to prepare them but ultimately has to say "I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now."

That's the thing about this life we can only bear so much at any given moment; especially when we are sucker punched by the cruelty of life. There is no way we can even begin to conceive the way that life might evolve from this moment or what God might have in store on the other side. There is no word of assurance, no promise of new life, no insight or clarity that could take away the pain of that given moment. What we need is exactly what Paul speaks of in Romans 8. We need space to fall apart and grieve and groan.

One of the promises Jesus makes here is that once the Spirit has come after the day of Pentecost, God will accompany us in those moments. And Paul adds when we do not know how to pray the Spirit will intercede for us with sighs too deep for words.

When I first Sally (as I will call her) she was deep in one of those seasons of life. She was devastated after the death of her husband and it led her on a long journey of reflection and pain and eventually over many years -- healing. I had the honor and the privilege of walking with her for some of that time nearly a decade ago now. And I remember what it was like when there were no words and we didn't know exactly what to pray. If someone had tried to say to her in that moment when her world was cracking wide open all the things that she would discover over the next several years; if someone had tried to show her just how dark those next years would be or point to the time when the darkness

would begin to lift and the light and the joy begin to enter....there was simply no way for her to bear it. You cannot hand to people what can only be discovered. You cannot summarize and package neatly what can only come through lived experience; what can only be pieced together as insight comes and life evolves. Well I just learned that my dear friend, Sally, at the age of 86 was married yesterday. I heard that news as a testimony to God's deeds of power.

Around the same time I learned her news, I read a piece on the blog of the NPR program *On Being*. One of the regular contributors to this blog is Omid Safi who is on faculty at Duke University and is the director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center. He wrote a piece that brings to life this tender moment Jesus shares with his disciples here in John. Dr. Safi was reflecting on what is like to sit with someone whose dreams have come crashing down. Here are some words that came to his mind in thinking about friends in such a place:

*Wipe your tears, child
It's not the end of the world.
It's the end of a world.
Beyond this world,
many worlds there are
It's not the end of the world.
It's the end of the world
you've known.
Other worlds await you.
Worlds you'll inhabit
Worlds you'll create.
Mourn now, my child.
Mourn this world
coming to an end.
Grieve the dreams
That will never come to be
Wipe your tears, child
And dream again.
There are more worlds to come.
After every apocalypse
You will rise again, my child.
One world ends,
Another begins.*

*The Jesus of your soul
Now on the cross
Buried under
Will rise again
After this year of sadness
There'll be an ascension
The joy tomorrow
Is already inside
The grief today
Inna ma'a 'l-usri yusra Fa inna ma'a 'l-usri yusra.¹
It's not the end of the world
Many worlds there are
Other worlds
Await
Worlds that you'll make
With your hands
Dreams of seeds
Watered with the now tears.²*

John gives us this tender moment where Jesus longs for his disciples to understand the worlds beyond worlds that await us when we live by the Spirit. Pentecost is the day when the disciples are stunned by the awareness that there are so many worlds open to them beyond that one single moment when the world they knew crashed around their feet. God was not done with them. There was still so much God had in store. So much more God had to say.

That is what we celebrate on Pentecost - the wide open world that God's Spirit is leading us to discover and even have a hand in creating. We didn't hear the rest of the passage from Acts as we presented it today but the way that Peter interprets this moment when everyone in the room is hearing this account of God's deeds of power in their own language is through an old prophecy from Joel:

¹ This is a quote from the Quran that translates as follows: (Inna ma'al 'usri yusra) With difficulty is surely ease (Fa inna ma'al 'usri yusra) Surely with difficulty is ease.

² Omid Safi from his column for On Being <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/other-worlds-await-you/7504>

“This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.’” And then the passage ends “Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Pentecost is the day when it becomes clear that God’s work of salvation, making creation whole again, will not cease until it is completed and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And this work of salvation (restoring and repairing what is broken) is going to come through the visions and dreams of God’s people --- from the young to the old, the men to the women, the powerful and elite to the marginalized and oppressed - the Spirit knows no boundaries.

So in honor of Pentecost it is important to name some of the places where we have seen God’s deeds of power: like some kids inspired to support a school half way around the world, or some beautiful human beings taking a chance on love in the 9th decade of their life , or a member of this fellowship over in New Zealand sharing his vision of how Shakespeare can transform the lives of the imprisoned, or the dream of another to make summer camp available to kids with disabilities so they could experience the rite of passage so many of us had growing up.

But lest you think I mean only those who identify themselves with the church of Jesus Christ, the Spirit will not be limited in such a way. The Spirit goes far beyond our reach to inspire and prompt and motivate and move people from all places, all religions, even those who don’t have faith all still giving themselves to the vision that Jesus proclaimed to us.

So here is the image for Pentecost in my mind, it comes from the movie *Tomorrowland*. It is a scene where they are rounding up of the dreamers

from around the globe: a musician from a city street, a scientist from his lab, an artist from her studio, a farmer from a remote village, every race, young, old, presumably every religion – gathered to imagine and create a better world.

That is the vision of the church: to be a people who call forth the dreamers. And when the world as we know it comes to an end, we make space for lament and the Spirit joins us there and then we rise up and begin to dream again. That is the vision of the church – to let this sacred meal fuel our dreams. Come for all things are now ready!