

*Larger than Life*

Pentecost

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Text: Acts 2:2-21

A long time ago in a church far far away, a 15-year-old young woman with really curly hair and a really opinionated disposition did something she REALLY did not want to do. She made profession of faith. Lets call her Bethany. The reasons Bethany didn't want to make profession of faith were legion. She didn't like being the center of attention. She didn't like feeling that she was being forced to do this because to NOT do it would make her parents, a church elder and the church pianist look bad. She didn't like that she was making what felt like an adult decision that she wasn't equipped to make yet. She didn't like that she still had a million different questions about faith and too few answers but was still supposed to make an educated decision to join the church. But Bethany made profession of faith anyway; She did it because her parents made to do it.

True confession, Bethany is actually me. I'm sure you didn't figure that out from the story. Genevieve, Emily, Liam, and Julian, I wonder if you have experienced any of these feelings too? Back then, a part of me knew that I was a part of something huge that I couldn't understand and I wanted to do right by God and myself in making the right choice at the right time, which is actually why I strongly considered NOT making confession of faith, not because I didn't take faith seriously, but actually because I took it REALLY seriously. I am willing to bet there are many others who have waited on profession of faith for similar reasons. Deciding to call faith your own and being a part of the church IS huge and is not a decision to be made lightly. But here's the deal. Questions about God and faith don't get any easier and many will not ever be answered with clear logical certainty. How about that truth bomb? BUT there IS lots of hope, excitement, and joy to be had along the way too. The journey might not always be predictable but it is enriching and exciting. More about that in a couple of minutes, but first we are going to take a look at Peter in today's gospel story for a bit of inspiration.

So I realize there is a LOT going on in today's passage from Acts; I think we could explore the Pentecost story every Sunday for a year and still have plenty to

think about, but for today, we are going to zero in on Peter. In particular, I want us to explore the first half of verse 14 that says “But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them”. In the midst of all the imagery and action in this passage, WHY would I pick the most boring 12 words in this entire passage? Because Peter, a normal, flawed, loud-mouthed, fickle human being is actual the voice of an entire new movement. We see the birth of his prophetic leadership, taking place in one of the most dramatic events in the Bible.

In case you have forgotten, here is a brief refresher on the person of Peter. He is a fisherman by trade, not a statesman or a rabbi. He is a big talker who jumps before he thinks, as demonstrated by the time he walked out on the water to meet Jesus, only to THEN notice the waves and start to sink. Or the time when Jesus washes the feet of the 12 disciples, only to have Peter argue with him about its appropriateness. And of course, there’s that small little detail about Peter betraying Jesus not once, but three times, just as Judas did. In fact, this betrayal happens less than 2 months before this event at Pentecost.

So what qualifies Peter to suddenly be the voice and leader of an entire new subversive movement?

The only thing that qualifies Peter is that Jesus calls Peter to follow him and Peter says yes. He says yes when Jesus tells him to start fishing for people instead fish. He says yes to Jesus when Jesus explains to him that washing his feet is the only way to be part of Jesus. Peter then says, not just my feet, but my hands and head too! And even after Peter betrays Jesus, Peter accepts Jesus’s forgiveness in saying yes to feeding Jesus’s sheep. Peter didn’t have his life together, he just said yes to Jesus.

Now this is NOT to say that Peter doesn’t have many gifts, surely he does. The very boldness and passion that gets him in trouble is the very thing that propels him to take risks and embolden others around him. But, it is the saying yes to Jesus that puts into motion the refining work of God’s spirit to take his strengths AND his weaknesses, forging them into a supernatural anvil of strength. God qualified him way before Peter was ready. Peter said yes, use me God.

And now Genevieve, Emily, Liam, and Julian, you have said yes. Jeff, Sarah, and Eden, YOU have said yes. All of you here today, through your baptism, your profession of faith, your commitment to keep asking questions and be a part

of something you don't always understand or feel ready for, YOU are saying yes. We are all part of this same movement in Pentecost and God's spirit is at work, in our gifts and especially in our weaknesses. We, like Peter, are filled with God's spirit and are being empowered to do things we don't understand nor feel capable of doing on our own. Is this not both the most amazing and scariest news you have ever heard? Genevieve, Emily, Liam, and Julian, buckle up, this is going to be one amazing ride.

If we all keep saying yes, even when we don't understand God, even though WE betray God, even when we run our mouths or curse at Tulip Time tourists, or even give up on ourselves, how might God use us?

I can give you a personal example. Just this past week, Pastor Gordon and I were reflecting on when I first started working as the youth director here almost 5 years ago. After several interviews and simply loving everyone I met here in the process, I was offered the job. Should be the end of the story right? Well, the truth is, I turned it down. It wasn't because I had another offer or didn't WANT it. It was because I felt completely unqualified. I had never held a job working with young people. I didn't take one single youth ministry class in seminary. I was not a 25 year old granola type who played guitar, or any other picture in my head of what a youth minister would look like. Not only did I feel unqualified, I feared that I would ruin the young people here, incite them to hate Jesus, and single-handedly close the ministry of Hope Church. I might have a slight flare for the dramatic when I feel anxious. Thank goodness, Pastors Gordon and Jill and the search committee were not only patient with me, but assured me that they knew all of this about me and still wanted me to come. So I finally said yes and took a call I felt unqualified for, yet knowing that this was where God was leading me. This was my "standing with the eleven and raising my voice" moment.

And this is what it means to say yes to God and the church. It means you will find yourself in your own version of standing with the eleven and raising your voice. Your version of raising your voice might not be a call to be a pastor like me or it might. You could find yourself in the midst being in a school group project with a person you don't like but who needs a friend and God's spirit inexplicably fills you with compassion instead of irritation so you can be her friend.

You might be convinced being a varsity swimmer is in the cards for you, only to not make the team, so you join the debate team instead, learn you love it and go on to become an attorney making life more just for countless people.

You might find yourself in the nursery more, because you learn that you love babies and have a gift for comforting them, even though you thought you were too young to help out in church. There are many possibilities and curious turn of events when you follow Christ. There are many things that don't make sense with our life in Christ. These are challenging and difficult times, with questions with too few answers, but God calls us anyway, giving us just what we need for such a time as this. So go ahead, keep saying yes.