

Movement of the Spirit (Pentecost)
Acts 2:1-4, 14-21 & Romans 8:24-27
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First Presbyterian, Luling

I remember the first time I heard of Pentecost, and it was fairly late in my church experience, well after the time I considered myself a pretty churchy kid. I don't know if we didn't celebrate it before then, or if I just hadn't been paying attention. I was in about sixth grade, and our minister had asked some of the moms and elementary kids to make banners for Pentecost. Our church had lots of banners, but not any for Pentecost. I had no idea what Pentecost was, but we made two banners of doves. One said "Come Holy Spirit," and was a red rectangle of felt, with felt flames. Pretty standard for a banner. The other one, at least to my young eyes, was spectacular. It was dove shaped, with the dove in various colors. No words. On top of the dove, in an intricate pattern, we glued shiny gold braid. It turned out amazing. They must have stood the test of time, because the church is still hanging them up on Pentecost. At that point, I'd gathered that Pentecost had something to do with doves, the color red, and the Holy Spirit.

True. All true. But not all of what Pentecost means. I don't think 12 year old me had any concept of what or who the Holy Spirit was, though I could have told you about God the Father and Jesus at length. But I had a good excuse. Presbyterians aren't exactly experts in the movement of the Spirit. Our dedication to being decent and in order sometimes inhibits our attentiveness to the presence and movement of the Spirit.

The Pentecost story tells the tale of a bold, dangerous, unpredictable Spirit, swooping in with wind and flame, wildly unexpected. The Pentecost story also tells the tale of a Spirit that brings an amazingly diverse crowd together, not to make them all the same, but to bond them together with this experience, and to ground the experience in Jesus Christ. It's a story that is meant to be unsettling. Not decent or orderly, but the disorder is holy, too. That was hard for me to say, so I'll try it again. The disorder of Pentecost is holy.

I tend to make decisions for myself and for my family in ways that lead to calm, not to chaos. If something is going to make our lives more complicated, it needs to have some justification and reasoning behind it. Some benefit needs to outweigh the increase in chaos. I know plenty of people that thrive in fast-paced, busy, complicated schedules. But that's not me and not us.

However, I have recently agreed to adopt a friend's cat. We've never owned a cat before. I've never wanted a cat before. The girls didn't talk me into it; in fact, one of them asked me if I was feeling ok when I suggested that we take Jolene. The cat will arrive sometime in the next few days, and it is not going to be a decision that leads to increased calm in our household. Andy is not thrilled with the idea. Daisy the schnauzer is going to be appalled, loudly so, at the intruder in the back yard. It's going to complicate the use of the doggy door, which I love and appreciate with all my heart. The amount of chaos, especially in the short term, is going to skyrocket. There are benefits, to be sure. My friend was relieved to know that Jolene will have a new home. The kids will be taking on some of the responsibility for caring for her, as they've recently also taken on additional Daisy-related chores. But those benefits are going to seem skimpy, I suspect, as the complications and chaos descend.

So why in the world did I decide to suggest that Jolene could come live with us? I don't know. It was an instinct, emotion-based decision. "Decision" makes it sound more deliberate than it was.

Maybe, maybe, maybe, it was the movement of the Spirit. That bold, dangerous, unpredictable Spirit, a little dangerous, wildly unexpected. That Spirit. The indecent and out of order one.

There is another side to the Spirit, and we see that Spirit in our reading from Romans. It's also all over the Gospel of John. The Advocate, the Comforter, the one who walks alongside us. Those are all names for the Spirit from John. Romans reminds us of the Spirit who intercedes for us in prayer, with sighs too deep for words, according to the will of God. I think these may be the most comforting verses in the whole Bible. This Spirit isn't wild, dangerous, unpredictable, unexpected. No wind and flames. No confusion or chaos. Instead, this Spirit is deeply comforting, steadily present, providing all the spiritual insights that we can't manufacture ourselves.

Could it have been that Spirit motivating me to say yes to the cat? Possibly so. We're all sad our friends are moving, and the cat will be a comforting reminder of them. She's a very sweet cat, affectionate, funny, communicative. Fuzzy animals of all kinds can be a comforting presence when we don't need someone bombarding us with words and conversation.

The chaotic Spirit, or the comforting Spirit? Which is it?

It's both, of course.

When we need some comfort, when the world has become too overwhelming, when we're without hope and driven to despair, that's when the advocate, comforter, walk alongside-er Spirit comes. During the pandemic, for instance, this is the Spirit we were desperate for. That Spirit upheld us and encouraged us, gave us hope, knit us even more closely together. We needed comfort and spiritual support, and the Spirit provided.

But when we have gotten too comfortable, when our life together has become too predictable, when we think we have everything figured out, that's when we need the chaotic Spirit to show up. The Spirit sends us someone new or different. The Spirit gives someone a wild idea. The Spirit nudges us out of our comfortable rut and into something that seems a little bit risky or dangerous. I *think* I'm ready for that Spirit to show up, not just through Jolene the cat, but here, among us, in this congregation. I *think* we're ready for that. Maybe. That's a little scary to say. Can you ever be ready for something as unpredictable as the Holy Spirit? Who knows what might happen?

Chaos and comfort, all in one. That's the Holy Spirit. Both unpredictable and utterly dependable. Contradictions held together, which is definitely the movement and presence of the Spirit. Let's be open to the movement of the Spirit among us.