

Spirit of Restlessness; Acts 2:1-13; Pentecost

Second Presbyterian Church

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Pentecost is often called the birthday of the church. After all, the people received an incredible gift! I'll be reading from Acts 2, verses 1-13. Listen for God's word for us today.

Scripture:

²When the day of Pentecost had come, the people were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Sermon:

Fredrick Douglass is known as a leading social rights activist from the 1800s. However, Douglass began his life as a slave in Maryland. In the beginning, the wife of the Auld family who owned Douglass treated him almost like an equal and she began to teach him to read. In his first autobiography Douglass writes, [Mrs. Auld] had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under [slavery's] influence, [her] tender heart became stone, and [her] lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness.

The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me.¹

One of the first things oppressive societies do is to withhold education from the masses. Education is withheld or defunded, books are banned, universities are made to teach what the state mandates, all based on the assumption that ignorant people don't question.

Even the church has used this tactic. In the medieval period, the church leaders did not want the common person to question the mandates of the church. Basically, the only people who were literate were the nobility and the clergy. In the 1400s the printing press was invented and the Guttenberg Bible was the first mass-produced printed Bible designed for the common person to read. Access to books made available by the printing press and knowledge brought about by public schools increased literacy.² Subsequently, it has been harder to keep knowledge from the masses, and as knowledge has increased the church has also been changed.

Frederick Douglass couldn't get enough reading. As soon as he was prohibited from reading, he sought other teachers. He took bread from his enslavers and traded it for reading lessons from the young white boys in the neighborhood.³

Reading was a lifeline for Douglass and introduced him to all kinds of new ideas, otherwise unavailable to him. Reading allowed Douglass to dream many unauthorized dreams; he read about the evils of slavery. Douglass said, and I quote, "The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers."⁴

In our reading this morning from Acts, God sends God's Spirit to descend on the faithful. It sounded like a rushing wind and it looked like fire. The reality was that God's Spirit opened up a world of opportunity and understanding for the disciples. Many languages were spoken but each person could understand the different languages spoken by others. "How can this be?" (v 8) they asked; "what does this mean?" (v 12). I don't think these questions were random. It was God's Spirit that brought on these questions.

¹ Frederick Douglass, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, from https://mseffie.com/assignments/invisible_man/Douglass%20Learning%20to%20Read.pdf accessed 6/5/25.

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Western-education-in-the-19th-century> accessed 6/5/25

³ Frederick Douglass, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, from https://mseffie.com/assignments/invisible_man/Douglass%20Learning%20to%20Read.pdf accessed 6/5/25.

⁴ Frederick Douglass, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, from https://mseffie.com/assignments/invisible_man/Douglass%20Learning%20to%20Read.pdf accessed 6/5/25.

I imagine Frederick Douglass asked these same questions when he realized that he didn't have to be a slave forever. *How can this be? What does this mean?* God questions.

We too can learn by asking the questions: *How can this be?* and *What does this mean?*

Today is a day of recognition at Second Presbyterian. A day to recognize seniors who have finished their studies in one phase of life and move on to new studies or life in a new phase. We recognize our students in this congregation and all they have learned about God's love and grace during this past year. And finally, we recognize our teachers, who have given of their time and talents to fill the heads of our young people with new and hopefully exciting ideas about God.

Teachers, books, and questions, like God's Spirit, put ideas into our children's heads that some people may not like. These ideas include God's idea of inclusivity. Everyone, everyone on Pentecost received God's Spirit, not just the affluent or the church leaders. Everyone, including children, should be accepted and valued in our church community. These ideas include God's idea of curiosity. God's people asked questions because they did not yet understand and they needed to learn more. We too can need to learn more because knowledge is power. These ideas include God's idea of diversity. Many languages were represented in the room that first Pentecost, but each person could understand the language of every other person in the room. Diversity and difference are attributes of God and of God's church.

On Pentecost all were included, questions were asked, and each person brought their own unique gifts into God's new community, differing gifts necessary to the building of God's church. Yet all were filled with the Spirit, a diverse yet unified experience. An experience where questions were asked and curiosity was empowered.

Our God is a God who needs all of us to make God's church a reality by learning and asking questions of God and one another.

By handing out books to our children and youth, we are giving them the tools to continue learning about God, to be curious and to ask questions. We are teaching them about God's diverse creation and church, and that God brings us together in a unified community to learn and grow and love one another.

Every time we gather in community, as God's people did on Pentecost, every time we are curious and ask questions, and every time we study new ideas, we thwart the power of evil and domination which is practiced in our world. Like that young church on Pentecost, God has filled us with God's Spirit of fire. Like Frederick Douglass, we learn that we don't have to be slaves to sin forever. God has set us free!

Thanks be to God, Holy Parent, Faithful Child, and Spirit of Restlessness!
Amen.