

## Speaking of the Marvels of God

June 5, 2022 at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, UCC

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*Texts: Acts 2: 1-17*

Will you please pray with me?

When our words fail your Spirit remains. Spirit of God, be with us here today as we reflect on your word and work in the world. Amen.

My heart has been lingering on Kate Layzer's opening words from last Sunday all week: *How shall we open the word of God today? What words can we find, what meaning are we to look for in the face of the unspeakable?*

The unspeakable, the moment in time when it feels like the end of the road, the days after the loss of a loved one or a friend or the loss of how we thought life would turn out or how the world would or should be... what words that we can come up with are enough in days like these? In days where shootings and hate crimes and acts of dehumanization are commonplace, in days where we can't quite make sense of things because we are still in the midst of them, where do we find new life?

I wonder if this is what the disciples were thinking too having yet again said goodbye to their loved one and friend Jesus after his ascension. Jesus tells them that his absence is not the end of their story together and yet they have to yet again learn to live without him and trust in an uncertain future. And so, they gather together on a day marked in the Jewish calendar to thank God for a plentiful harvest, to pause and rest in gratitude for what they have, to trust in the process and something amazing happens. The Spirit of God rushes in among them and helps them speak of what God has done and will do in the world even after Jesus has left them physically. God shows up and conspires

with them to speak of radical hope that people will hear and respond to despite the barriers in absorbing that message.

Today is a special day in the liturgical calendar called Pentecost. It's the day when we tell the story of the Holy Spirit showing up amidst a group of Jesus followers gathered together in a time of in between. God calls them into relationship with one another as the Spirit inspires them to speak of, as our text says, "the marvels of God." It is a story that we use to mark the official beginning of the early church, an event that inspires the witnesses to sign up for this strange, messy, and beautiful project called being church, something that we are continuing right now as we popped confetti and waved our rainbow ribbons and as we reflect on this story together now.

It's a birthday of sorts, the birth of a community committed to listening to the workings of the Holy Spirit and preaching good news in a world that so desperately needs it. It's the start of a broader network of relationships that prioritize the needs of the whole, that lift up the ones on the margins and strive for understanding instead of fear. It's the beginning of a gathered body that pays attention to the authority of their children's wisdom and allows its elders to indulge in their dreams. It's the beginning of a movement that embodies the transformative love that Jesus lived for and the fact that the experiment inspired by the Holy Spirit is still embodying that love today is something to celebrate.

Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit is not just something that happened long ago, an event that we can look back on as a part of Church history but is something that is happening all around us right now. The Holy Spirit is here, present in our very breath, sparking our sense of joy, sustaining our hope, and cradling our weary heads, wiping our tears like a mother tending to an overtired child. She rushes into our lives not in a logical way with a polite introduction, but in a tactile and tangible way, turning our hearts towards God, tugging at our souls with an urgency that is primal. We feel her in the pit of our stomachs when faced with the realities of injustice, in the gentle lift of our

hearts in a light-hearted moment with someone we love, in the gratitude we feel for the work God has done despite the challenges that we have experienced, in our willingness to dwell in our questions instead of rushing to easy answers. We cannot live fully without the presence of the Holy Spirit giving us breath, gifting us with the courage to be our full selves and know we are beloved. By the way, Happy Pride Month! She is the gentle whisper reminding us that God is still with us despite all we have been through. She reminds us that we are still called to speak of her wonders in our unknowing and that her wonders are still unfolding too.

Recently I came across the message translation of verse 3 from Psalm 5 and it goes like this. The psalmist says, “Listen, God! Please, pay attention! Can you make sense of these ramblings, my groans and cries? God, I need your help. Every morning, you’ll hear me at it again. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on your altar and watch for fire to descend.” These words feel all too familiar even though I hadn’t seen that translation yet.

When the unthinkable happens and we find ourselves looking out on an undefined path, not quite knowing the way forward or through, perhaps in the midst of it all we are being invited to relinquish our control and give over the pieces of this life to the movement of the Spirit. When we do so, we pause to cry, to give thanks, to be proud of surviving, to say we are still here somehow and there the Spirit is: our holy mother still living in our questions, still cradling our worries, still using our hearts to birth love into the world, still inspiring us to speak truth to power and to tell our own truth in this world. Even if just for a moment as we lay down all that we have been holding with lament and gratitude, we have faith that God has something she has yet to do with and for us.

Our dear friend and former minister of this church Mary Luti wrote a reflection for the UCC devotional this weekend. She spoke about Jesus’ habit of continuing to return to the disciples to eat with them even after the last supper. She writes about how through this returning, we are made aware of God not ever being done with being present in our

world. She picks up on a theme of God's enduring presence that I believe is at the root of Pentecost. Pentecost celebrates that God's life changing, liberating, surprising and messy work in the world did not stop at the resurrection, but continues to unfold as this collective pull of love and deep hope that the Spirit sustains. In resistance to the violence, the grief, even our own unbelief, we declare today that the work of the Spirit is not over but is creating new beginnings in places we have yet to see. She is breathing new life into the world. She is helping us speak about the unspeakable. Mary Luti ends her reflection with an alternative blessing for when we remember the last supper through communion. I invite us to dwell in these words as we take communion on this Pentecost Sunday and in all those moments in the coming weeks we just need a little bit more help from the Spirit, the abiding love and wisdom aiding our every breath. Let us pray:

*“We remember, O God, that the worst happened. But here we are. By grace and grit, we're not done yet. Pass the bread, good Jesus; pour the wine. Gather us in grateful relief, good Jesus, at the Table of Not Done Yet. Remember with us that love outlives death, the work goes on, the feast never ends.”*

Amen.