

The Wild Ride  
Acts 2:1-15  
May 31, 2020 – First Congregational Church of Meredith, NH  
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**Acts 2:1-12** When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

When my children were little, on the night before their birthday, we would snuggle together on the sofa and tell them the story of their birth. Each one had a special story, because each birth was different. They loved to hear those stories. We told Weldon of the wild ride to the hospital and the nurse calling the doctor at home to say, “You’re not going to get here in time.” Walt’s story was about a trip to the zoo, and labor that started as we watched a baby kudu take its first steps, and then there was another wild ride to the hospital and a doctor who really DIDN’T get there in time. Anna Cathryn arrived at a gentler pace. We told her the story of stopping at a hair salon on the way to the hospital, to let a friend know that Anna would soon be with us. I laughed then that I had wanted to get a hair cut before I went to the hospital, but I guessed it was too late. Before I knew it, I was sitting in the chair, in labor, getting my hair cut by a very nervous stylist. It turned out VERY short. Anna Cathryn arrived four hours later.

Our scripture today is the story of the birthday of the church, and it is one we tell every year. Jesus has ascended into heaven, and the disciples are left to figure out how to put everything he had taught them into practice without him there to lead them. So, they go off to a room together for days and just pray together. That’s a powerful way to approach any problem, praying earnestly together. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit rushes into the room like a violent wind, filling the entire house. Every person there is filled with the Spirit and seems to have tongues of fire resting on them. They all start to speak different languages, languages that they didn’t know before. They rush out into the street and start to tell everyone in the city, each in their own language, the great good news of the Kingdom of God breaking into the world.

And right there, when the disciples leave their familiar space, stop talking just to each other, and rush out into the world to share the good news, that moment is the birth of the church. It is the day that everyone was invited to the party, the day WE were invited to the party, too. It is the day that the world changed.

A few weeks ago, I told you a story from the Gospel of John of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit directly into the disciples after the Resurrection. That story is called the “Little Pentecost.” It is intimate and

personal. This story in Acts is not gentle at all. It is the wild ride that ends in the sudden birth, the exciting, scary, memorable story of the rush of the Spirit into each and every one of Jesus' earliest followers, and then to the world beyond their little room. The disciples are used to following Jesus, and he is gone. They haven't yet figured out how to organize themselves and find human leaders. And here comes the Holy Spirit to inspire the church, to lead them out into the world, and to give them the words they need to say.

I told you at the beginning of this service that I will be candidating at another church next week. If they vote to call me, I will be leaving here later in the summer. My time here was always intended to be temporary. I was called here to lead you through the work of the interim period – to think about the church's history and identity, to encourage and support lay leaders (including new leaders), and to help identify new directions for ministry. You may remember the timeline we created, showing the church's history, and the word cloud of all the things we love about this church. You may also remember identifying the things that are most important to you in the person who is called to be the next settled pastor. That is the work of interim ministry. So is revising the bylaws and cleaning up the membership rolls and cleaning out closets and learning new forms of worship, from modern language for the Doxology to worshiping with Zoom. It was also my task to help the search committee with some of its early work.

I am pleased to tell you what you already know: that this is a strong church, that you have done your work well, and that your search committee has done its work well. I am not worried about the future of this church. You will do fine after I am gone. So, one day soon I will move on to a new call, and there may be a few weeks between my departure and the arrival of your new settled pastor. Some of you may feel anxious, especially because we are not in normal times. But this church has strong lay leaders, and our conference has other pastors who can fill in briefly. More importantly, today's scripture, the story of Pentecost, tells us that the Holy Spirit will provide the leadership that this church needs in the in-between times. God does not leave the church orphaned. God sends the Spirit to take care of us in need.

In recent weeks we have found comfort in gentle scripture, in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and in intimate conversations between the resurrected Jesus and his followers. But sometimes our path is not comforting at all. Sometimes it is exciting and a little bit scary and it takes us in totally new directions. This church has already figured out how to worship well from a distance, and to take care of each other with phone calls and cards. We are learning how to be the church in a pandemic, and I pray that we will also learn to bring the challenging, comforting voice of God to a world filled with pain and unrest and injustice, that we will speak, as Jesus did, for those who are suffering and oppressed. Sometimes the Holy Spirit takes us on a wild ride, and that ride leads to a new era of our history, to a new birth.

Happy Birthday!

Thanks be to God.