

“Let It Shine”

A Sermon Preached by Rev. Young-Mee Park
Pentecost / Confirmation Sunday, May 23, 2010
First United Methodist Church of Oak Park

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? 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?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2: 1-21)

“What does God look like? Has anyone ever seen God? Where did God come from? What was God doing before creating the universe? What does it mean that God is one, but at the same time three?”

These were some of the questions raised by our young people, who are being confirmed today. I acknowledge, nine o'clock on a Sunday morning was not always a good time for this heavy stuff. Definitely too early, for any stuff! But for me, the issue was not just about the time of day. I cannot speak for Elizabeth Loudermilk or Liz Gracie, our wonderful confirmation teachers, but I confess that I often scratched my head.

In one of my recent wrap-up meetings, one of our confirmands asked, “Now, I think I get it. I receive confirmation as a gift. But what happens if I still have questions and doubts after being confirmed? What will that mean?”

I told you, they often make me scratch my head, but I just love my students when they ask these sticky, and yet, sincere questions. I learn so much from them. They challenge me, of course, but at the same time, they recharge me. They fill me with renewed hope and energy.

You see? Many of us, the adults, live in a settled, well organized, and flattened world. Often, we content ourselves with the truth that is trivialized, tailored, and even twisted to fit our little comfortable worlds. We do not want anything to unsettle or threaten us, do we? We think that we know who we are. We like to think that we are essentially nice people trying to become a little nicer.

Not so for our young people. They are on a difficult journey of discovering who they truly are. They want to know what a life of faith truly means. And they are not content with mechanical and routine answers. They do not want the truth that is reduced or rendered inane. They ache to break open old presumed realities. They dream of a world filled with beauty, truth, justice, and mercy. Yes, they see visions and dream dreams.

Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter proclaims in our scripture lesson today: “When the time comes, God will pour out God’s Spirit upon all flesh, and our sons and daughters will see visions and dream dreams. All those who serve God, men and women, young and old, they will prophesy.”

Our lesson also depicts a vivid and powerful picture of that day. It was the Feast of Pentecost. People were gathered in one place - pilgrims from all over the world. Suddenly, there was a sound like a strong wind. No one could tell where it came from, but it filled the entire building. Then, like a wild fire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks. And they started to speak in different languages. They started to understand each other. They started to share all things in common. They worshiped together. They prayed together. They broke bread together. Every worship, every meal, was a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God.

My friends, this is what we are about. We, the Christians, are a people with an awesome calling to stand free, joyful, and hope-filled in a world gone fearful. We, the Christians, are a people with a stunning vocation to think, imagine, dream, and live into the new realities that God will yet enact.

My young friends, I do not guarantee that, now that you are being confirmed, your life will be a straight road toward heavenly bliss. No, the life of faith rarely consists of a straight line. There will be ups and downs, peaks and valleys. There will be moments of clarity; there will be moments of confusion. There will be moments when you have a strong sense of God’s presence, and there will be moments when it gets blurry, fuzzy, and even messy, and you wonder where God is.

Today, I want you to remember that all this is an integral part of your journey. Today, I want you to remember that God is there, not only in moments of conviction and clarity, but also in your questions, doubts, and struggles. You are God’s beloved, no matter what. God pours out God’s Spirit upon you, that you may see visions of beauty and truth, justice and mercy. God pours out God’s Spirit upon you, that you may stand free, joyful, and hope-filled in this world gone fearful. God pours out God’s Spirit upon you, that you may hold a light, through the night, through the storm. You sang it so beautifully today. Let it shine, my friends, let it shine!

God loves you so much, and so do we! All God’s people say, AMEN!