

# Up Close

The Day of Pentecost, 9 June 2019

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:14-17; John 4:8-17

A few months ago, a bat got inside the building on a Wednesday night.

We don't normally have bats in the belfry, thank goodness. We don't have a belfry, for that matter. It was just a busy Wednesday night and while the door happened to be open a bat flew in.

I'm sure she was more scared than we were, poor thing. She was just flying along, minding her own business, eating mosquitoes to help us all out and suddenly she found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. The parish hall has plenty of room to fly around but very tiny exit doors. She didn't want to stay, but she couldn't figure out how to leave.

We sent the children to the outreach center. Adults were studying in the library. A few were eating dinner around tables. I hid in my office. I am terrified of flying things. The long arm of the law, our District Attorney Julia Slater, trapped the bat in a salad bowl and took her outside and let her fly free.

The Holy Spirit is often compared to a dove. The gospels tell us the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove. A sweet, beautiful, graceful dove, gently gliding and hovering over creation.

The description in Acts 2 sounds more like an indoor bat.

Outside, of course, bats do have more in common with doves. They fly high, eat their bugs, and try to stay out of the way. People put up bat houses to welcome them to the property. Bats are useful and helpful and good.

But inside, a flying bat is a holy terror. Bats can't see, so they screech and click to echo locate. They swoop and get in your hair. They can fly for what seems like hours before getting tired out. And frankly, they are not pretty creatures, so even at rest they are frightening to some. Me.

The sounds like what was unleashed on the believers the Day of Pentecost. A sound like the rush of a violent wind. Not a gentle breeze, mind you. More like the roar of a tornado. Tongues of fire appeared among them and rested on them. When you touch a flame accidentally, you pull away to keep from getting burned. This fire rested on them, presumably burning their heads. People started speaking in languages they didn't know. Others may have understood what was coming out of their mouths but the people doing the speaking could not understand. It was wild.

Some suggested the people might be drunk. "No, that can't be it," said Peter. "It is only 9 o'clock in the morning," which to me is one of the funniest lines in the Bible. Peter could joke because he knew what was going on. He recognized this wildness. This is what the Spirit of God looks like up close.

From a distance, the Spirit of God hovers and heals and guides and calls. From a distance the Holy Spirit broods lovingly over creation. From a distance the Spirit helps us know how to pray, sometimes with sighs too deep for words. From a distance, the Spirit seems fairly manageable and mostly comforting.

But up close, that same Spirit does some wild things. The prophet Joel had described it about 900 years earlier. And now, Peter was seeing the words of the ancient prophet come to life right in front of him. And rather than

run away, Peter named it. He had the boldness to give credit where credit was due. Rather than hide from the chaos, Peter ran to it. Like Julia Slater, who captured the bat with a salad bowl in order to set it free. Peter captured the Spirit present in this moment by naming it. And in naming it, Peter set the Spirit free to do its work.

The Spirit's work on that day was give birth to the Church. We think of today, the Day of Pentecost, as the Church's birthday. It's the one thousand nine hundred ninetieth birthday, give or take. The prophet Joel spoke the word of the Lord to describe what the Spirit looks like up close. The Day of Pentecost confirmed the vision. And the Holy Spirit on that day created the Church as a means for the Spirit to get close to the world.

So on this Day of Pentecost, let's do what Peter did. Let's name how the Holy Spirit is at work in us and among us so that by naming it we can set the Spirit free.

When your sons and your daughters prophesy, that's the work of the Spirit. To prophesy is to speak the truth of God. In some churches and in some places that gift has yet to arrive in all its fullness. In many places, tragically, the voices of half the population are still diminished. But the Spirit still works in this and every day to help sons AND daughters speak their truth. And it is wild and frightening to some, but that's what the Spirit looks like up close.

When your young see visions AND your old dream dreams, that's the work of the Spirit. The Spirit gives younger people hope for the future. The Spirit keeps older people from falling into despair. As young people lead efforts to care for creation and heal racial division and prevent gun violence, that is the work of the Spirit. As older people invest their time and their resources in leaving the world better than they found it, that is the work of the Spirit. That's what the Spirit looks like up close.

"Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Peter misquoted Joel a tiny bit here by adding the word my – my slaves. Peter was reciting from memory, so it may have been a mistake, but I think Peter did it on purpose. He was speaking in God's voice, calling enslaved people "mine." Peter was reminding the crowds that God claims the most vulnerable people in the world as God's precious possession – my slaves, both men and women. That's the work of the Spirit. MY people in bondage throughout the world. MY victims of human trafficking. MY immigrants. MY people living on less than \$2 a day in the United States. MY beloved LGBTQIA children. MY people struggling to survive. When people God has claimed as a special possession claim their belovedness and speak their truth, that's the work of the Spirit. That's what the Spirit looks like up close.

And Peter quoting Joel said all of this tends to happen at the worst possible times. When the whole world seems to be falling apart. When you see portents in the heavens and chaos on earth, even then the Spirit is active. She is flying even closer. Fasten your seatbelts, but don't panic. The Spirit of God is near.

Today is a work of the Spirit. This community has been so blessed to see Spirit up close in the Olive-Allison family. The journey that brought Susie and Meg and Kingston to this moment is their story to tell so I won't tell it all. I hope you'll all come to coffee hour and stay for the picture and hear more. But it involved lots of truth-telling and claiming your voice and defending your right to be a family and holding on to hope even in times of chaos and fear and leaning on a village. The Spirit has given you the courage to will and to persevere.

And so now we come to the waters of baptism to do what the Lord invited through the prophet Joel. The Lord promised, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Peter quoted that invitation on the Day of Pentecost. In response over 3000 people were baptized, just like all the baptized here. Just like Kingston.

We come to the waters of baptism to call on the name of the Lord. Save us, Lord. Save us by helping us renounce the way of evil and turn to the way of love. Save us by drawing us into the apostles teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. Save us by helping us seek and serve Christ in all persons and

love our neighbors as ourselves. Save us by teaching us to honor the dignity of every human being. Save the world by helping us proclaim this good news.

Let us come to the waters and call on the name of the Lord.

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