

**From Every Nation**  
**Acts 2:1-10**

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During a portion of my sabbatical pilgrimage I stayed in the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland. This Christian community dedicated to reconciliation and peacemaking has been in existence since the 1960s and the troubles between Protestants and Catholics. Their mission continues to this day. In addition to participating in a retreat for clergy I also led a retreat in liminality and spirituality, that powerful inbetween transitional state of being.

One day I was in the commons, the dinner room, when a man I had never met before came up to me and introduced himself. He was from Scotland – a psychotherapist there – and he was married to his wife originally from France, also a psychotherapist. He told me that he really wanted to talk to me about his wife because they thought I might be able to help. Of course, I was surprised by this contact out of the blue, but was willing to do what I could.

Soon enough he introduced me to his wife and we found a place to talk. Her story was one of thick, layered grief in which she had lost four of her closest relationships to death in the span of one year. After some time together she found some peace in the midst of that storm.

Later, as I was passing through the center, a woman came up to me as a kind of third-party courier. She informed me that the woman I had helped had to leave Corrymeela so she couldn't thank me in person. But she wished to express her thanks and she did so by giving me a gift, a wooden Celtic cross. I said thank you, but she continued:

“The cross has a story that comes with it and I am supposed to share that with you as well.” I sat back and listened.

“A few years ago,” she continued, “the woman you helped was actually working with a man who was an IRA (Irish Republican Army) militia man. This man was engaged in the violent resistance to the British repression of the Catholics in the north.

His part in that civil strife had led him to engage in assassinations, bombings, kidnappings, and other terrorist acts all of which contributed to the escalating spiral of violence that his enemies simply echoed in kind. By the time that our friend was working with this man he was a shell of his former self, a person with the invisible wounds of moral injury, a man who desperately wanted some kind of redemption from himself and his past.”

She paused and I waited almost breathlessly.

“And this is his cross. He gave it to her after coming to terms with the evil in which he had participated, his part in it, and claiming some new way forward in forgiveness and hope. And he gave her his cross as a sign of everything he was giving away and giving up through the cross of Christ. She has worn this cross ever since. And now she wants you to have it.”

Centuries ago Jesus followers gathered together in one place, waiting for the manifestation of the Spirit in their midst. They didn't know what to expect or what even to pray for.

In the fullness of time the Spirit poured over them with the force of wind and fire and ecstasy. And suddenly they were filled with a new spirit of purpose and confidence. God was with them in the most unexpected way, and in that spirit they would turn a corner and go forth with the good news of God's love shown in Christ pulsing in every cell in their bodies.

We make a mistake if we believe that is a one time occurrence, if we limit God's activity to a rare time in history long ago. The Spirit continues to blow and the holy fire continues to consume us in many times and places, from Jerusalem to Northern Ireland to Columbia. It comes on its own terms and gives what is needed even when we do not know what that is. Like the wind, we do not know from whence it comes or where it is coming, and yet it comes.

Whether it is an unknown woman who presents herself to me at Corrymeela or the man she worked with years before, we don't just pay it forward, though that is very important.

This is more a case of “thanking it forward,” that is waiting for the unexpected blessing that comes without our having made it and then thanking it forward, passing the cross of redemptive work forward.

I know for me that it is something not to be forced and that someday I will thank this cross forward at just the right time and place I cannot know at this moment.

This is the transforming story of our baptisms: that our old self is crucified with Christ and we are raised like him to a new life. In the Christian way this process of transformation is repeating, a cycle of grace, from one state of glory to the next. This is a mystery I am sharing with you, the mystery of the redemption of our souls. And also the redemption of the world.