

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MAY 31, 2020**  
***“BRAVING THE WILDERNESS”***

**The Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 104**

*What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side.*  
**The moon keeps track of the seasons, the sun is in charge of each day.**  
*The wings of the wind are your messengers, fire and flame are your ministers.*  
**Send out your Spirit and we spring to life to bloom and blossom.**  
*When the sun rises, the darkness vanishes. When you let loose your breath, we sing;*  
**Oh, let us sing to God as long as we live!**

**Song of Focus**  
***Bring Your Pentecost Again***  
**Words and Music by Ed Varnum**

God, your people wait and pray for your power from above  
that sustains our lives each day to change the world by your great love.  
You transformed fear into hope on Pentecost so long ago.  
Now, we ask for that same power. Send your Spirit! Fill our soul!

All around us and within, Holy Spirit, here this day;  
fill and mold us in your image. We would follow in Christ's way.  
If you're known in tongues of fire and a rush of mighty wind  
or speak in a still, small voice, bring your Pentecost again.

“Not by might and not by power,” that is what your prophet said,  
but by the Holy Spirit that raised you from the dead.  
If you're known in tongues of fire and a rush of mighty wind,  
or speak in a still, small voice, bring your Pentecost again.

You spoke out through prophets then, speak through us, your church, today.  
Fill and mold us in your image; we would follow in Christ's way.  
If you're known in tongues of fire and a rush of mighty wind  
or speak in a still, small voice, bring your Pentecost again.

Holy Spirit, hear our prayer: bring your Pentecost

## **The Scripture**

### **Acts 2:1-21**

*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."*

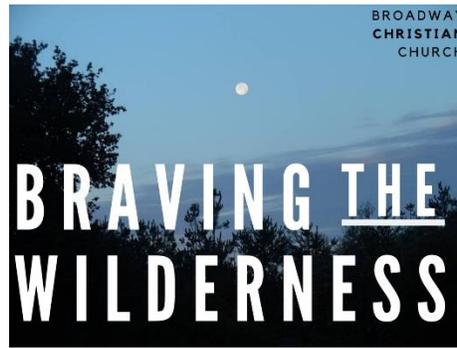
*But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the 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.'*

## **The Message**

### ***Braving the Wilderness: Giving Voice***

#### **Nick Larson**

Synopsis: There are defining moments to anything we value; times we can look back and say, "*That's when everything changed,*" or "*That's when it took on a life of its own.*" Jesus had spoken of the gift of the Holy Spirit but, you know, such wasn't a familiar concept: "*How?*" "*When?*" "*Will we know for sure?*" Peter was first to recognize: "*Ah, this is it! The Spirit is moving,*" and everyone found a unique voice to share... "*as the Spirit gave them ability.*"



This story startles me, if I am being honest, with its scene of almost unimaginable liveliness verging on chaos. A sound like a rush of a mighty wind filled the whole house; tongues of fire appearing among the people and as the crowd was filled with the Spirit of God, speaking in a cacophony of languages.

It seems...unbelievable.

It is almost as if this completely unimaginable thing just happens. Crowds from all over the world, thousands are converted in a single day. Where people from all different religions, languages, cultures, stories, backgrounds, seemingly put everything else aside in order to back a very small band of followers that are willing to follow a fluid Spirit-driven freedom out of fear that seems to instantly replace centuries of more hierarchical structured integrated religious way of life.

All of that is hard for me to fathom, because I've read Paul's letters. The early church was not a circle in which people sat around in harmony and agreement all the time. The sheer conflicts in those early communities of the church constitutes the bulk of Paul's letters; he same conflict and strife that we know exists in every church.

Who belongs, who does not, how to fulfill this mission of Jesus? When do we gather back in person? Which leader do you want to follow, Paul, Barnabas, James, the temple? Jen Hatmaker, Otis Moss III, William Barber, Steven Furtick? Which faction of this do you back? That sounds much more like the world that I know.

Yet, this Pentecost story is this widening circle of Spirit into something that feels dismissed if we reduce it to a small moment. Sometimes to justify it, we seemingly tame the impossible, making it a simple story of speaking and hearing in tongues long ago.

Is this a moment of unimaginable life that kickstarted a religion that changed the course of human history or is this the story of a fledgling religion had their leader executed by the state where after now retelling their "my fish was this big" story? Are we talking more of a Hawaiian breeze or a Chicago gale?

That question I will leave for you to answer. The part that I want to share with you this morning is what does it mean to look deeply into this moment and see what parallels we can draw for ourselves.

A major point of this story, I think, is that we are all in this together.

Now it's likely that when I referenced "this," you thought of the global pandemic that has been with us for more than three months now. And, Yes, we can talk about this in reference to the global pandemic that has had enormous impacts on each and every one of us. Over 100,000 American lives have been lost already. It is strange that saying 'this' requires no explanation for it has become ubiquitous, as John Green described it, our "this" makes its way into every aspect of life like light through blinds or flood waters through shut doors. It is a truly universal moment of human experience, even as we all experience this differently.

And that is true, but also 'this' is also a reference to all the 'this's of our lives. There is nothing that you aren't in with others. Despite what we want to believe and how we choose to often act, we are actually all in "this" together.

For centuries, western culture has been permeated with the idea that humans are selfish creatures. That cynical image of humanity has been proclaimed in films and novels, as well as emphasized in history books.

There is one famous story that takes place on a deserted island somewhere in the Pacific. A plane has crashed, and the only survivors are 15 British schoolboys, who, at first, love that they are a beach with no grownups.

On the first day, the boys institute a democracy of sorts. One boy, Ralph, is elected to be the group's leader. Strong, handsome, and charismatic, his game plan is simple 1) have fun, 2) survive, 3) make smoke signals for passing ships. Number 1 works, the others? Not so much.

The boys are more interested in feasting and frolicking than tending the fire. Before long, they have begun painting their faces. Casting off their clothes. And they develop overpowering urges - to pinch, kick, and bite.

By the time a British naval officer comes ashore, the island is a smoldering wasteland. Three of the children are dead. "I should have thought," the officer says, "that a pack of British boys would have been able to put up a better show than that." Ralph bursts into tears and weeps for the end of innocence and for the darkness of a man's heart.

Well, as you've likely figured out by now, you know this story, and it never happened. An English schoolmaster, William Golding, made up this story in his famous 1951

novel *Lord of the Flies*, which sold millions of copies, and was translated into more than 30 languages, hailed as one of the classics of the 20th century.

Most, like I did, read this book as a teenager, and I remember being sad reading it, but not for a second did I think to doubt Golding's view of human nature.

Yet, there is only one problem. It isn't true! And this is not the narrative told in the event at Pentecost. This week, I read an excerpt from Rutger Bregman's book *Humankind*, translated by Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore. He asks, "What would happen if real children found themselves alone on a deserted island?" A real-life *Lord of the Flies*.

In fact, there was at least one such event. In 1966, an Australian newspaper *The Age*, ran the headline "Sunday showing for Tongan Castaways." The story was about six boys, who had been found three weeks earlier on a rocky islet south of Tonga, an island group in the Pacific Ocean. The boys had been rescued by an Australian sea captain Peter Warner after being marooned on the island for more than a year.

Peter had his own fishing boat, which he was sailing in the winter of 1966. On the way home, he took a little detour, and that's when he saw it: a minuscule island in the azure sea. The island had been inhabited once, until one dark day in 1863, when a slave ship appeared on the horizon and sailed off with the inhabitants. Since then, it had been deserted - cursed and forgotten.

But Peter noticed something odd. Peering through his binoculars, he saw burned patches on the green cliffs. "In the tropics it's unusual for fires to start spontaneously" he reported. Then he saw a boy. Naked. Hair down to his shoulders. This wild creature leaped from the cliffside and plunged into the water. Suddenly more boys followed, screaming at the top of their lungs.

The boys, once aboard, said they were students at a boarding school. Sick of school meals, they decided to take a fishing boat out one night, only to get caught in a storm. There were six boys - Sione, Stephen, Kolo, David, Luke, and Mano – all pupils at a strict Catholic boarding school. The oldest was 16, the youngest 13.

In a bored wit-less time, they came up with a plan to sneak away. Packing only two sacks of bananas, a few coconuts, and a small gas burner, they set out, not even thinking to bring a map, let alone a compass. No one noticed the small craft leaving the harbor that evening. With little sailing experience among the boys, the wind ripped their sails to shreds and broke the rudder. They drifted for eight days without food and water. They tried catching fish. They managed some rainwater in the hollowed-out coconut shells, which they shared equally among them.

On the eighth day, they spied a miracle on the horizon. A small island to be precise. Captain Warner wrote in his memoirs, "By the time we arrived, the boys had set up a small commune with a food garden, hollowed-out tree trunks to store rainwater, a gymnasium with curious weights, an old knife blade and much determination." While the boys in *Lord of the Flies* come to blows over the fire, the real-life version tended their flame, so it never went out, for more than a year.

The kids agreed to work in teams of two, drawing up a strict roster for garden, kitchen, and guard duty. Sometimes they quarreled, but whenever that happened, they solved it by imposing a time-out. Their days began and ended with song and prayer. Kolo even fashioned a makeshift guitar out from a piece of driftwood, half a coconut shell and six steel wires salvaged from their wrecked boat - and instrument Captain Peter still had.

There are many amazing details of this adventure on the island, about how they would lift each other's spirits, their attempts to build boats to get off the island only to have them defeated by crashing surf. Stephen even fell off a cliff and broke his leg. The other boys picked their way down and helped him back up and set his leg using sticks and leaves. And they tended to him, even as he couldn't contribute.

They survived on fish, coconuts, tame birds, seabird eggs, wild taro, bananas, and chickens (which had been thriving in place of human inhabitants). They were finally rescued on Sunday September 11, 1966.

Yet, this wasn't the end of their little adventure, because the owner of the boat the boys had borrowed 15 months earlier, was still furious, and decided to press charges.

Fortunately for the boys, Captain Peter came up with a plan. He figured this story was Hollywood material and managed to sell the Australian rights to their story and paid off the boat getting the boys released.

As the boys were returned home, their families were jubilant, and Peter was proclaimed a national hero. When the Tongan King talked with Peter, he asked if there was anything he wanted, and all Peter asked for was to let him trap lobsters in their waters and start a fishing business." So, Peter moved to the island, commissioned a new ship, and then hired those six rescued boys, giving them an opportunity to see the world beyond Tonga, which is what started the whole ordeal.

Your real *Lord of the Flies* is a tale of lifelong friendship and loyalty; one that illustrates how much stronger we are if we can lean on each other.

Too often in our world, like this week in the tragic death of George Floyd, we see those who are intended to protect and serve, abuse their power using violence, instead of seeing the one whose life they took as being intimately connected to them.

When I read this story in the book of Acts, I think, indeed, the Spirit did a miraculous thing, but the stronger story isn't the idea that the Spirit came one time a long time ago, transforming the church then, it's that it still connects us all these years later.

Diana Butler Bass said it this way, "We are named, each with our individual names, and with that familial name: Child of God. We have names. We share a name. We are fully ourselves; we are fully one with each other."

We can find our voice to have a more radical reliance on the fire of the Holy Spirit and each other, as it has been through the history of the Church. From medieval mysticisms that taught of the spirit, to the radical wing of the Reformation that insisted upon its importance, to the emergence of the Spirit you can find alive and well among churches reinventing themselves in the midst of a pandemic. We, too, must tend to this flame year after year.

Pentecost should challenge us, this congregation, to find the Spirit within ourselves; to locate, claim, and utilize our own authentic voices, gifts, and skills with which to love and serve.

In this my final Sunday serving as one of your pastors, so let me say that is what I hope you will remember. And if I can leave our baptismal candidates to trust in something:

*I would invite you to trust in each other, to see the Spirit and Spark of God within each and every human being, to do what Jesus would do, which is to love first.*

To find a way to be like those boys on the island, to love and serve each other, responding to the gift of the Holy Spirit with the belief that no matter our differences, our languages, our cultures. We are in 'this' together.

That, indeed, if we can listen, if we can hear, if we can overcome our differences, we can live into that vision of the Prophet Joel that Peter, the Apostle, proclaimed on that first Pentecost, that God will pour out God's Spirit upon all, and that includes you and me.

This story, perhaps, is so familiar with its so seemingly obvious message, that the Spirit of God unites us all. And this is demonstrated in some of the most obvious ways, like the barrier of language and culture. The merging together of the heroes of the early church who are both lovable fools, who can't seem to understand Jesus in those three years with him, and yet the same ones who he encourages, he commands to love others with courage, and the now seemingly obvious story is that they do just that.

And our assumptions like that in assuming about the *Lord of the Flies*, and not those six boys rescued, is the inevitable outcome.

But that's where we are wrong, and God is right. God declares humanity, even the ones we don't want to be "with" are indeed connected together.

It is like in that famous song "You'll never walk alone" from the musical *Carousel*, that is sung at football stadiums around the world, that says "walk on, walk on, with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone."

The line may be cheesy, but even when we may feel alone, even in the crushing grind of isolation, we aren't alone. That like on that first day of Pentecost where we hear Peter conjuring up Joel's vision of heavenly signs and earthly wonders, sun turns to darkness and moon to blood, signs of the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day, the day that, Peter told them, has already dawned in Jesus Christ, the same Christ whose Spirit blows through that house, and this one, and your house, in which they (and we) are standing or sitting, whose fiery love created a community where only strangers stood before.

This story isn't about minimizing suffering or fear, or the long road that we know the early Church went through, or that we are in the midst of right now, but still humanity does and must find ways to like Louise in *Carousel*, that even if you don't believe it, when you start singing it, that you believe a little more when you finish. That you, yourself and anyone who can hear you, won't walk alone because the Spirit is with you, and connects you to all of us, always and forever.

So say we all. Amen.

### **Nick's Blessing and Benediction**

Go forth into the world with compassion and justice in your heart. Give strength to the weak, voice to the silent. Hear one another; see one another; care for one another. Because, it is all that easy, and it is all that hard. Go forth with the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore. Amen.