

Out of Chaos and Pure Power Timothy L. Carson
Acts 2:1-21 May 20, 2018

In the text of Fred Pratt Green from our choir anthem today we hear the story of Jesus' baptism, crossing through the waters of transformation, and the way the Spirit descended upon him, launching him into a new chapter, a new era. In the same way, the text pleads, invade and upend us, disrupt our ways to send us in God's new direction, fueled by the Spirit of Pentecost.

Water, chaos, and holy disruption. Baptism, Pentecost and Spirit. Breaking the chains and sending out. Crossing over and starting over. Death and resurrection. This is not a gentle little story. This is a blockbuster, full of turmoil, turbulence and tumult. There is dissonance before you come to rest. The wind will blow and flames will glow. Before all is said and done you will say things you never thought you could, hear in ways unfamiliar and strange.

We have a tendency to domesticate all things religious but Pentecost defies those efforts. Think of T.S. Eliot's poem from his Four Quartets:

*The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre of pyre-
To be redeemed from fire by fire.*

In the same way that Fred Pratt Green in our anthem described a holy invasion, knocking down the blocks, lives disturbed, so Eliot spoke of a dove descending that breaks the air, like a sonic boom, vibrating the web of life so that every wave is felt everywhere.

Then he goes so far to say that the only difference between hope and despair is a choice between fire or fire; the fire of destruction or the fire of the Spirit that consumes all things.

We have the picture of some great adventure movie in which the pursuing hoards have run the lead character to the edge of a precipice and there is no escape.

At this point the choices are two: 1) Remain on top, this side of the precipice, and wait for the worst that is closing in on you, or 2) jump. In the movies there always seems to be a river below that sweeps you away. River or not, the moment of jumping comes and you take a deep breath and take the great leap of faith.

That's what T.S. Eliot describes, the necessity to choose. To leap or not to leap, that is the question. Fire or fire, pyre or pyre. And the choice you make is the difference between hope or despair.

What if one of the real roles of the Pentecost Spirit is to dislodge us, to move us, from here to the other side of there? Think of the early followers of Jesus, reeling from the unimaginable events they witnessed, everything from the crucifixion of their Lord to appearances that testified to his continuing

life among them. And there they are, gathered together, waiting. What can possibly move them off the dime?

Have you ever felt spiritually, emotionally, physically, vocationally, relationally stuck? When you do there is a feeling of being frozen in place, unable to move. Some people feel like they are sleep-walking through their days. Just getting through it.

Then a divine disruption breaks the air. The foundation shakes. The Spirit defibs us with a jolt of adrenaline. And we become alive to what's next.

If you notice the disciples shared a physical experience laden with spiritual meaning. Their experience was like a mighty wind. They heard and spoke in universal ways, understanding the testimony of others not with the head but with the heart. This manifestation of Spirit-Power was meant to take them somewhere, just as it is meant to take us somewhere.

We cross the river, choose between fire or fire,
shake free to an astounding destiny that only God
can prepare. And in the midst of it all the imprint of
Christ's life is felt upon our own: We are not alone.
The pioneer of our faith goes before and beckons
us, draws us forward.

Water, fire, wind

Pouring, burning, blowing

Spirit, voice, heart

Breaking, praying, hoping

Church, faith, mission

Crossing, trusting, serving