

“Sabbath: A New Creation”

Psalm 29

Acts 1-2, selected verses

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Lake Forest, Illinois
Pentecost Sunday

Last week, our graduating seniors preached on the story of the road to Emmaus, when the disciples were surprised to discover Jesus walking with them. Our youth talked about how they feel the Lord’s presence with them now – not appearing in flesh and blood, but present nevertheless. I wonder if we could say the same thing. Today as we celebrate Pentecost, I invite us to consider this question: where do we experience Christ’s ongoing presence with us through the Holy Spirit?

Sometimes I think we’ve gotten so utilitarian, so practical, that we stop wondering about the Spirit’s presence. We are so used to going quantitative, we stop wondering about quality, about feelings, about purpose, about sacred surprises. If we can just reduce our world to measurable outcomes:

- What are the numbers on my student’s ACT or GPA?
- What are the numbers on my favorite player’s RBI?

- The numbers on my broker's ROI?
- The numbers on my body's BP or BMI?

Show me the numbers and I can show you my life, reduced to efficient acronyms.

And then something sweeps in that reminds us otherwise. Let me give you a few on-the-ground examples from our congregation.

This week, Chuck and Laura Caruthers learned that their newest grandson, little Elliot Joseph, was adopted safely at 5 months old. Their pictures tell a thousand words: the joy, the relief, the certainty at last that Elliot was safely in their new parents' arms. How can you measure that?

This week, our young professionals heard Rep. Bob Dold speak at our Faith & Leadership breakfast downtown. He shared the insanity of 15-minute-by-15-minute scheduling, the events to attend, the lobbyists to listen to, the

bills to draft, the behind-the-scenes meetings to negotiate. And then he shared how privileged he felt to be pouring himself in to this work, to resist the climate-change deniers, and flex whatever muscle we need to in the Middle East, and work across the aisle to keep our country safe. How can you measure that?

And this week, Sue Dixon took me on a golf-cart ride through the Skokie River Nature Preserve tucked behind Green Bay road. She showed me native Trillium in their fading bloom, and towering trees that are centuries old; we heard birds screeching joyously while the wind rustled and whistled through the leaves; we watched her two old dogs run like puppies ahead of us, then bound into the creek to swim, emerging from the muddy water baptized in its joy. How can you measure that?

Even dreadful things can wake us up to life again, shake the dullness from our senses, slap us upside the head with urgency. The phone call from a loved one that it's cancer. The morning news that covers a shooting far too

close to home. The whispered confession from your teenager that he's done drugs again. The sinking recognition of a goal not met, a deal that's failed, an investment that went south. Even terrible things can wake us up, can startle us to pay attention, to look up from the measurable certainty and wonder – really wonder – what our life is for, what really matters.

However the wake-up call happens – in joy or in sorrow, in energetic purpose or the sudden recognition life is short – however the wake-up call happens, I'm convinced more than ever that these are Pentecost moments, when we hear the voice of the Spirit come crashing – or whispering – into our lives:

- The voice of God's Spirit stirring up the still waters;
- The voice of God's Spirit thundering in the wind;
- The voice of the Spirit whispering gently in our ears;
- The voice of the Spirit urging our senses to attention;
- The voice of the Spirit speaking to us in whatever way we can hear.

- Speaking to us in a way we can grasp.
- Speaking to us in whatever native language we can understand.

The Bible tells us that is how God made the first creation: God spoke, and by that breath, there was light. God spoke, and by that breath, there was life. God spoke, and by that breath, there was human love. God spoke, and by that breath, creation sprung into place. And then, God took a deep breath, and saw that it was good, and called that moment “Sabbath.” Sabbath, that moment in creation when we pause to savor this miracle – this life - this world that God so loves.

And what is the promise of Pentecost if not this? That God is still creating, stirring things up with light and life and love, not once but over and over and over again. God’s voice is still creating, still speaking in ways that we can hear, getting our attention in whatever language we understand. Using our friends’ voices, and our family’s voices, and perfect strangers’ voices, and sometimes – sometimes, even *our* voices, to speak a word of tenderness or

encouragement, of correction and often, second chances. And this is my heartfelt prayer for us: that we don't miss it. That in our busyness, or our preoccupation, or our cynicism, or our doubt, or our fear, or our desire for concrete, measurable outcomes - that we don't miss the voice of God speaking to us. I, for one, believe the youth are absolutely right. The Lord is still with us, coming alongside us, calling us to follow, even now. Amen.