

Pentecost Physics by Rev. Tracey Leslie
Scriptures: Acts 2:1-21 and Psalm 104:24-34

Happy birthday to you... and me! Today is the Church's birthday. On this Jewish holy day of Pentecost long, long ago in the city of Jerusalem, the Church was born. God's breath, God's wind, God's Spirit blew mightily and there was new life, renewed life. So, "happy birthday" to you and me and all of us here at University Heights and in churches around the world.

A few years ago, Britt and I were in Chicago for a brief vacation. We took Mr. Wiggles with us. It was his first time in a big city and, as those of you who have made Wiggles' acquaintance might have already guessed, it was a bit rough for him. He was no fan of the noise and all the people gathering around him on the street corners. Crossing under the El tracks when a train rolled overhead just about made him jump out of his skin. But, by the time we left, things had begun to improve and he was growing a bit more comfortable. Our final morning there, he and I headed to Daley Plaza near our hotel for Mr. Wiggles to do his business. Also there to do business was a Great Pyrenees. He and Mr. Wiggles exchanged "pee-mail" on a lush strip of grass. I asked its owner if the dog was friendly and if we might meet him. He assured us his dog loved to make new friends. So, Mr. Wiggles and I spent a couple of moments in his company. He was large, calm and confident and the demeanor of Mr. Wiggles began to change. He began to relax a bit. Unlike me, the Great Pyrenees spoke fluent dog and was, apparently, able to communicate to Mr. Wiggles that all of this was not as alarming as Wiggles feared. Britt and I both agreed that Chicago – along with many other first-time experiences for Mr. Wiggles – would be easier to

navigate with a canine companion who spoke his language.

There's a lot of alarming stuff in our world these days, isn't there; way more alarming than the rumbling and rattling of the El tracks? It can sometimes feel as if there's a lot of stuff rattling apart around us. And, when our anxiety level rises, we need someone who speaks our language to comfort and reassure us.

While this morning's Pentecost story from the Book of Acts is familiar to many of us, we don't often think about Psalm 104 on Pentecost Sunday; that's the psalm we sang that Abi led. The language of Psalm 104 evokes our memory of the biblical creation story, using not only some of the same images, but even employing many of the same Hebrew words. By the way, it is much lengthier than the few verses we heard this morning and I'd encourage you to give a read through sometime this week. Perhaps you might even enjoy reading just a couple of stanzas each morning as you start your day. It's a great way to start the day since Psalm 104 celebrates God as creator of all the earth and bestower of life through the giving of wind or breath, God's Spirit.

The psalmist reminds us that life is not something static. God is continually renewing life, renewing the face of the earth. Last week I referred to Deism, that strange theological belief that God created and designed the universe to work in such a precise and methodical fashion, that God was now just observing from a distance. From this point forward, God had left us to our own devices and any subsequent "adjustments" were up to us. But Deism was pronounced to be a heresy. Our God is not a deist God, some clockmaker who built the universe, wound it up, and is now just sitting back eating popcorn and watching us all wind down. Our God is not holding his

breath. Our God, who once breathed life into the first human, continues to breathe a rhythm of creation each new day. God sends forth his Spirit, his life-giving breath, to renew the face of the earth day by day by day.

On Pentecost day, a pilgrimage holiday for Jews, thousands of Jews from all over the Roman Empire were able to hear the message of Jesus in their own language as they gathered in Jerusalem. They were able to hear, each one in their own language, the good news that, in Jesus, God had done a new thing. In Jesus, God's Spirit was renewing life, bringing salvation.

Peter proclaims that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. We often don't realize that salvation is not just a soul thing, a singular "pie in the sky by and by when you die." Salvation is a current experience well-being and wholeness in a more diverse, comprehensive way. It is wellness of soul, yes, but also of mind and body; it is restoration in our relationships. When God's Spirit blows over the face of the earth, life is renewed and that is good news for everyone. One of my favorite prayers is a classic prayer from the daily office for morning. The prayer begins, "new every morning is your love, great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world." The renewing power of God, the fresh wind of God's Spirit, is at work in our lives and our world every single day. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are proof that our God is still with us and still working among us. And everybody oughta know that. Everybody oughta know.

Britt's and my first ministry assignment after seminary was a cooperative parish that included a small, racially diverse church in Erie, Pennsylvania called Henderson. While we were there, I found a music director who started a children's gospel choir. One of their favorite songs to sing was

“Everybody Oughta Know.” The chorus was really simple and it was call and response so you all can do it with me right now. Whatever I sing, sing it after me:

Everybody oughta know, everybody oughta know,
everybody oughta know who Jesus is.

That’s true, you know? Everybody **oughta** know. That’s why on that Pentecost long, long ago the Holy Spirit inspired those disciples to proclaim the message of the gospel in the language of all those folks present in Jerusalem that day. They all needed to know that God’s Spirit made manifest in Jesus brought wholeness and renewal to bodies, minds, souls and relationships. What a great thing to know and to hear in one’s own language, a language we can understand and make sense of.

And friends: it’s no different today. Everybody oughta know that the Spirit of the risen Christ breathes renewal, new-life and wholeness into places of fear, anxiety and discouragement. But they need to hear that message in a language they can understand like that Great Pyrenees did for Mr. Wiggles. For some people, what they’ve been told about Jesus hasn’t been a life-giving, life-renewing message. For some, the news has been more bad than good. And for some, what they’ve experienced of Church hasn’t been a very welcoming place. But we can change that. Like those first disciples on Pentecost day, we too can open ourselves to the presence of God’s Holy Spirit to enter us and anoint **our** tongues. Now, we’re probably not going to speak in a foreign language. It’s probably not going to be as dramatic and theatrical as that Pentecost day long, long ago. But, if we pray and wait and listen and open ourselves to God’s Spirit, perhaps we too will discover that we can speak the good news in a language others will

understand. Perhaps they will be astonished to hear in their own language what they have never heard before.

That's part of what our neighborhood walks are about. Now, we're not preaching Jesus at people the moment they open their door. But we are sharing the love and good news of Jesus as we listen to them with the ears of our hearts and as we invite them to share their experiences, their ideas, even their hopes with us.

Perhaps we too can become a fresh breath of air; bring a fresh breath of God's Spirit into their lives. Wouldn't it be great to be filled with God's Spirit in a way that allows us to exhale the renewing, enlivening breath of God for someone who is lonely, anxious or desperate? That's what those first disciples did... and it wasn't limited to Pentecost day.

So, on this Pentecost Day, in this time and in this place, this community, may we together pray, Lord, send forth your Spirit: renew us, renew your Church, renew the face of the earth. Amen.