

**Series: Timothy's Charge
Sermon: Do the Work of an Evangelist**

II Timothy 4:5 (NRSV)

As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Acts 2:1-12 (NIV)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

SERMON

It was years ago, we took our kids to the local library where there was an entertainer for the monthly children's hour. He had his guitar and was singing some songs, getting the kids involved. And while he's strumming away at the strings, he steps a bit closer to the microphone and says, "I see we have some really cool people here. Some really cool people who like to sing. And folks started singing with him. And in the song, he said, We have some really cool people who like to clap. So some people started to clap. We have some really cool people who sway with beat. And the crowd started swaying. And we have some really, really cool people who are so cool that they don't move at all. We call them "dads."

There is something about men, particularly in public. We don't let loose in song and dance. We stay inside ourselves, right? Many of us might say we do this as an act of charity to those around us. It saves them from having to watch us sing and dance. As a man – at least for me – I feel like there is something improper about letting loose. Certainly something a little big foolish if I did it. I get to hide behind a guitar while we sing, so I feel lucky. Of course, women do this, too. There is something so worried about looking improper that we clam up or tense up. We get tight – even if our personality is normally free spirited and open.

The disciples weren't being asked to dance or sway or anything, but they also were in a tight place. They were closed up and closed off, literally. When we meet them today, they are gathered together inside a house when something miraculous happens. But before we can talk about that, let's take a moment and remember who these people were. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but he grew up in Galilee. Galilee was a tiny region that today would straddle the border of Israel and Lebanon. North to south Galilee is about as far as it is from here to Salem. It was a region of villages and not much worth paying attention to. It was in this tiny and no account place that Jesus gathered up a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors and other average folks and set about a ministry that would change the world. Only they didn't know that, did they?

One of the great joys of reading the gospels is watching the disciples stumble around clueless. They are so

human, so much like us. Jesus tells them a parable, they don't understand. Jesus performs a miracle, and they start arguing about which of them will be first in the kingdom of God. Jesus asks them to stay awake while he prays, and they fall asleep. Jesus is dragged off to be murdered and Peter, the leader of them all, denies him three times. A woman in the courtyard recognizes Peter as one of those Galileans running around with Jesus, and he shouts her down, "I do not know the man!" After Jesus was crucified, they scattered and hid behind closed doors. When Jesus came to them – after the shock wore off – what a relief the disciples must have felt. All the things Jesus had said and promised were true. And then he told them in the first chapter of Acts, he told them he was leaving them again. They could not believe it. They were staggered. "Jesus," they asked, "are you going to bring in the kingdom first? You know, before you go?"

Jesus rises up into the heavens and they are staring up after him. They stare until a couple of angels shake them out of it. They are leaderless. They have no idea what to do. When they replace Judas, they just look up at God and flip a coin. You decide, they say. So, here we find them. Clueless. Leaderless. Huddled together in a house somewhere in Jerusalem. Looking up toward heaven and saying to God, we don't know what to do? You tell us, Lord. All those free spirited days back in Galilee are long behind them. There is no singing or dancing. How their enemies must have clucked about that. Here were these troublemakers – these hicks from up in Galilee – who had been talking big about God's kingdom. Now they are reduced to babbling about their dead messiah coming back from the dead. It wouldn't be long, no doubt, before they rounded up and treated the same way. Can we blame them for hiding in the house? Wouldn't you do the same thing? Wouldn't I?

But we know, don't we, that God does not like closed up and tight faith. God doesn't want us huddling in the house. God doesn't like an indoor faith. So he grabbed the disciples and shook them. There's a scene in the movie Forrest Gump that comes to my mind when I think about what happened in that house. Now, the movie has a lot of things in it that a Methodist pastor would not approve of. One of the characters is a profane man who lost his legs in the Vietnam War. He thought it was his destiny to die in the war and was angry at God and the title character – Forrest Gump – who saved his life in a firefight. Years after the war, the two are working on a struggling shrimp boat crew. The legless Lieutenant Dan is up on the very top of the mast. Down below, Forrest Gump is sorting through another empty shrimp net. Lieutenant Dan asks Gump in a mocking tone, "Where is this God of yours?" In one of the great lines of the movie, Tom Hanks, who plays Gump says tells us in a voice over, "It's funny Lieutenant Dan said that, 'cause right then, God showed up." The shrimp boat is caught in the brutal wind and storm of Hurricane Camille. The sea boils. The winds lash at the ship and roar. Lightning burns across the sky. When God shows up, it creates quite a ruckus.

This is what the Book of Acts reports. When the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples, there is fire and roaring wind. The disciples are shaken and seized by power. Crowds gather and gawk. The old enemies of the disciples mock them, saying they must be drunk. To answer them, Peter – this man who had been shouting that he did not even know Jesus – stands up in the crowd and proclaims the good news of the gospel. That's the story right after what David read for us today. When the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, it stirred things up. When the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, it drew a crowd. When the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, it pushed them out of doors and into the public. So, here is the question for us today on this Pentecost Sunday: Do we really want this to happen to us? Do we? Right now? Do we believe it is even possible? Do we believe that this room could at this second fill with the Holy Spirit? We could be caught in a wind like a hurricane swirling through this space. Tongues of fire could burst down and in through the ceiling. Do we believe that could happen right now?

The world outside this church tells us we would be crazy to believe that. In a world that makes us nervous about clapping our hands in public. Christians who actually say they expect an outpouring of the Holy Spirit are looked at as kooks. They would mock us just as they made fun of the disciples. That's just that crazy church on South End Road. That one, not the other one. Pay them no mind.

Well, to be honest, I think we sometimes get all tangled up as Christians. We get stuck quizzing each other over what we believe. Belief is important. Faith, hope, and love abide these three. But the greatest of these is love. Do we believe the Holy Spirit could fill this room right now?

Brothers and sisters, I tell you truly, if there is love in this room, I believe the Holy Spirit already fills it. The Holy Spirit is among us now. God chooses not to work so much with flashes and awe these days, but God works just the same. On that Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit took a rag-tag bunch of disciples and turned them into the church. The Spirit took people just like us, and did great and wonderful things with them. The good news today is that God longs to do the same with us.

That was one of Paul's admonishments to Timothy. We've been looking at Paul's last words to his Timothy, who represents the next generation of Christians. Stay Sober, Endure Suffering, Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. And this works for Pentecost - Do the work of an evangelist! The etymology of the word Evangelist is Good News. Good story. It has the same root word as an angel. An angel is a divine messenger. One with a message. One with something to say. And an evangelist has something to say. A story to tell. Paul is telling Timothy: You have the good news! You have a wonderful story to tell. Don't lock yourself up in a room and not share it. Storytellers need to tell stories. Songs need to be song. Prayers need to get prayed. If we wait on the Lord. If we listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If we set our hearts to loving God and loving our neighbors, the Holy Spirit will be powerfully among us just as he was powerfully with the first Christians. The special effects may be less dramatic, but the power is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Brothers and sisters, as Christians, we are Easter people. But it was the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that created the church. It has been the Holy Spirit that has sustained it throughout the centuries. And it is the Holy Spirit that today we pray will continue to nurture our church and our faith.

On this Pentecost Sunday we pray for the outpouring the Spirit. We pray to be shaken loose from our comfort. May we here be used by God to do a great new thing for his kingdom. And the family of God said, Amen