

“The world goes from life to death, but Christians go from death to life.”
A wise colleague of mine said this recently, and I can’t stop thinking about what it means.

Of course this wouldn’t make sense upon first glance or mention. We start first with what we can see and touch and hear to form our understandings of each other and the world we share, which makes sense. We know people grow older over the course of time, over the course of their life, and eventually those physical bodies and parts of themselves die, and join with God in the heavenly kingdom. We see the life and death cycle of the created world every year, with little green buds and leaves in the spring that grow and bloom and bear fruit through the summer, and each fall begin to wither, and die into hibernation every winter, and the cycle repeats itself every year. It’s the way things logically move in our world. But Christians do move from death to life. It’s the death of Jesus Christ that gives us the new life of the Christian life, the life in the Spirit, the life that God intends and creates for us all.

Without the death of Jesus at our core, the Christian church would not exist. Without Jesus’ death and resurrection we just become a social club, perhaps a charity organization, or education center, and there is of course nothing wrong with these groups or places, they serve important and life-giving purposes every single day. But it is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and what that proclamation inspires us and leads us to do, that makes the church what it is. The Holy Spirit makes it so.

And on no other day do we embrace the reality of the life that comes after death, than on Pentecost Sunday. Jesus says to us in the Gospel reading today: “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

The church rises forth from the Spirit’s releasing and movement in the world. The church as a community, as gathered people, exists because the

Holy Spirit of God wills it so. The church as a community of people gathered into one body exists because of the broken, risen, ascended body of Jesus Christ who inspires us to a new life, a new kind of body, a new Spirit of truth, hope, love, justice, and community that would not and could not exist any other way. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit, released in our world because of Jesus Christ that we are able to join together as community and see each other as our fellow created beings.

And it's easy to get more focused on who's in and who's not, upholding what has or hasn't happened in the past, these types of earthly things because it's what we can see and touch and hear. But we are called to something much greater than simply what lies on the surface and is easy to believe and digest. Something that indeed turns the very expected rhythms of what life is not upside down, but right side up.

The Spirit does not call us to stagnation, the Spirit calls us to new life. To community. To trust that even the wildest things that we could not imagine still have the power of God flowing within them. To embrace the changes of the time and the gifts of God that move and flow and breathe within us. To know that even in our skepticism, even in our curiosity and bewilderment, God is still moving. God is still changing our hearts and minds and we must embrace the powers of change for the sake of our neighbors.

The actual miracle that helped people realize the power of the Spirit in our Acts story today was the astonishing truth that they could understand each other. Even though they were speaking languages from cultures and peoples completely different and from other places than they were, there was a common understanding, a coming together that happened because of the Holy Spirit. The journey to get to that common understanding, that community of listening and hearing, did not come calmly and in an orderly fashion. There was fire. There were rushing winds. There was confusion and frustrations and frankly a lot of judgment, where some thought that the people speaking in tongues were just straight up drunk. It was easier to accuse and judge than it was to truly listen.

But it was in the listening, the moment of pause to realize that they actually could understand one another, that makes this story of the Spirit so very powerful.

It was in the way that the people actually took a moment to stop the frantic frenzies of frustration and fragility in their minds and instead opened their hearts to their fellow people. The focus was to understand and to hear, and to join together as community, rather than to judge or discourage or ignore.

And friends, on this Pentecost Sunday, on this day where we remember and celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit in the world, it is time for us to do some listening and community building of our own. It's time for us to cast aside the judgment we have for others and instead focus on the moments of pause that allow us to understand one another. It's time for us to truly open ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit and not just the movement towards our own comfort and keeping on as we always have been just for the sake of continuing it. The Spirit shakes us up and gives us hope, encourages us that even in the most uncertain of times, even when our world as we knew it has been completely upended (the disciples felt this when Jesus left them too, dear friends), there is still life and community to be found by the power of the Holy Spirit. It can feel like we are speaking different languages when we join back together with people after this fraught and uncertain time, and sometimes we are, but there is a common language of humanity that is made possible by the Holy Spirit who breathes new life into us and kindles new fires within us for the sake of God in our world. The common language of humanity is a desire to be known, to be listened to and heard and understood, a desire to be part of a community, a desire to be drawn closer to our God in love, in creation, in life made new.

The church itself was born from the shaking winds and certain words of the disciples, calling forth the wisdom of the prophets who foretold this day, and the love made human in Jesus Christ who led them to that day.

Though Jesus' death left them uncertain for a time, it is from his death and resurrection, ascension and gift of the Spirit, that the church was born, that new life in community for the sake of the good news was born. The church moved from death to life, and friends, I pray that the church, the sense of

community, the common language of humanity, of being loved by God and one another, indeed brings new life to us all. I pray that the faithful people in this time and place are able to love and praise God by leaning on where the Spirit truly calls us. I pray that our sense of community is built not on wanting to convince others of our rightness but on wanting to convince others of love of God, through our thought, word, and deed. What life can we breathe into our communities today, dear friends? I pray the Spirit gives you the strength and guidance you need to do that holy work, today and every day. Thanks be to God, Amen.