

Sermon for Pentecost 2016 – May 15, 2016

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus our Lord and through the power of his Holy Spirit. Amen

It seems hard to believe, but forty nine years ago, in 1967, I graduated from Lincoln Senior High School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. There were 501 seniors in that graduating class.

This coming weekend, I'll be in Madison, Wisconsin, for a four-day mini-reunion with a dozen of those classmates who somehow managed to stay in touch over the years. Having lived through Viet Nam, Watergate, and the Cold War, we former flower children are now on Medicare, anticipating retirement and looking every bit our age. Among our group are several educators, a social worker, a nurse, a professional tennis instructor, a lawyer, a legal paraprofessional, an art gallery owner and a couple of Lutheran pastors...we lost a third pastor to cancer three years ago. Each of us has had our ups and downs, but by and large, we all affirm that we've been blessed.

Back in 1967, none of us had any idea how we'd end up. No way of telling. No guarantees. But here we are. By God's grace, here we are. How can this be explained? Well, my classmates may have different answers, but I believe that the Holy Spirit has been at work in our lives...nurturing faith, sustaining hope, instilling courage, promoting health, offering forgiveness, providing comfort, and giving consolation...in short, witnessing to the renewing love of God as exemplified most clearly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, we are celebrating the baptism of little Paige Margaret Vander Linden as well as the graduation from high school of fourteen young First Lutheran students. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should celebrate these new beginnings in the context of Pentecost.

For it is on Pentecost that we rejoice in the outpouring of God's Spirit upon God's children. In our reading from Acts, Christ's Spirit came upon the apostles and filled them with a totally new way of experiencing life.

Barbara Brown Taylor describes it this way:

*There they were, about a hundred and twenty of them, Luke says, all moping around wondering what they were going to do without Jesus, when they heard a holy hurricane headed their way. Before any of them could defend themselves, that mighty wind had blown through the entire house, striking sparks that burst into flames above their heads, and they were filled up with it – every one of them was filled to the gills with God's own breath. Then something clamped down on them and the air came out of them in languages they did not even know they knew.*

*Like a room full of bagpipes all going at once, they set up such a racket that they drew a crowd. People from all over the world who were in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost came leaning*

*in the windows and pushing through the doors, surprised to hear someone speaking their own language so far from home. Parthians...expecting to see other Parthians, and Libyans looking for other Libyans,...saw instead...a bunch of Galileans – rural types from northern Israel dressed in the equivalent of first-century overalls – all of them going on and on about God’s mighty acts like a bunch of Ph.D.’s in middle eastern languages.*

*Before the day was over, the church had grown from one hundred twenty to more than three thousand. Shy people had become bold, scared people had become gutsy, and lost people had found a sure sense of direction. Disciples who had not believed themselves capable of tying their own sandals without Jesus, discovered abilities within themselves they never knew they had. When they opened their mouths to speak, they sounded like Jesus. When they laid their hands upon the sick, it was as if Jesus himself had touched them. In short order, they were doing things they had never seen anyone but him do, and there was no explanation for it, except that they had dared to inhale on the day of Pentecost. They had sucked in God’s own breath and they had been transformed by it. The Holy Spirit had entered into them the same way it had entered in Mary, the mother of Jesus, and for the same reason. It was time for God to be born again – not in one body this time but in a body of believers who would receive the breath of life from the Lord and pass it on, using their own bodies to distribute the gift. (Barbara Brown Taylor, “Home by Another Way,” pp. 144-5)*

What God did then, God does today. What God did once two thousand years ago, God does over and over again in our presence. The Good News is that through the Holy Spirit, God “performed artificial resuscitation on a room full of well-intentioned bumbling and turned them into a force that changed the history of the world.” (Taylor, p. 146) The Good News continues to be that through the Holy Spirit, God uses bumbling like you and me to renew the face of the earth.

In case you’ve forgotten, that’s what began to happen on the day you were baptized. And, today we rejoice that this is what begins for Paige Margaret Vander Linden. Similarly, today we remember and give thanks that this life-changing, earth-shattering, history-making process continues for McKenna, for Allie, for Hannah, for Mallory, for Eric, for Alex, for Mitch, for Jacob, for Autumn, for Jacob, for Jack, for Brandon, for Luke and for Sara.

Well, dear friends, as you might suspect, I can hardly wait to see my classmates again and to see what God’s Spirit has made of their lives since last we were together. But, as excited as I am about that reunion, I am far more curious and eager and enthused about what the Holy Spirit has in store for Paige and the fourteen graduating seniors who call this church home. I can only begin to imagine the things that they shall see, the dreams that they will dream and the joy that will be theirs!

May God bless them...and you, now and always! Amen