

The God of All Mothers

Acts 2:1-21

May 11, 2008

Calvin and Hobbes is probably one of my favorite cartoon strips. In one of them Calvin approached his mother and asked: “Mom, can Hobbes and I go play in the rain?”

Mom: “No.” Calvin: “Why not?”

Mom: “You’ll get soaked.” Calvin: “What’s wrong with that?”

Mom: “You could catch pneumonia, run up a terrible hospital bill, linger a few months, and die.”

Calvin, looking out the window at the rain: “I always forget. If you ask a mom, you get a worse-case scenario.”

Hobbes: “I had no idea these little showers were so dangerous.”¹

One evening a mom went to a PTA meeting. Her husband and daughter decided that they would surprise her and clean up the kitchen. They did everything – put away all the food, wiped off the counters, washed the pots and pans and put them away, put the dirty dishes in the dishwasher and turned it on, and swept and mopped the floor. Then they sat down and awaited her return.

Two hours later, she came in the door, took off her coat, walked through the kitchen into the den, grabbed the remote control, and began watching television. They followed her the whole way and then just sort of stood by her chair. Finally she realized they were standing there looking over her shoulder. So she looked up at them and asked, “What?”

The husband said, “The kitchen.”

She responded with, “The kitchen, what?”

He said, “We cleaned up the kitchen. Didn’t you notice? It’s sparkling clean. We cleaned it for you.”

And she said, “Yes, I noticed. Thankless job, isn’t it?”²

And one more just because I think it’s funny. A mother was notorious for her lead foot. She was pulled over one day by a Georgia State Trooper as she raced through the state on her way home from Florida.

Hoping to get off with a warning, she tried to appear shocked when the officer walked up to her car. “I have never been stopped like this before,” she said.

The officer responded: “What do they usually do, ma’am, shoot the tires out?”³

Besides today being Mother’s Day it’s also Pentecost Sunday, that day when we remember the occasion when the followers of Jesus first became aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. It had to have been something short of unbelievable for them to use images of tongues of fire dancing above their heads and the sound of a violent wind and a number of different languages being spoken at once and people on the outside believing their behavior being similar to that of a bunch of drunks.

“They’re drunk!” That’s what some who gathered around the outside of the house decided. And who can blame them for such an observation. They probably hadn’t ever heard the kind of singing and fellowship and sense of community they observed in that house except perhaps in their neighborhood bars. Oh sure, the crowd had the wrong idea about church – was there for all the wrong reasons (“Let’s go see the show at First Presbyterian” or “I’m going to see what hocus pocus those stupid Christians are up to today”).⁴ But, in the end they wanted in on it – 3000 of them!

When the Holy Spirit entered that room on the day of Pentecost and the disciples started to act strange, the church was born. When the disciples became aware of the presence of this new presence in their lives they were accused of being strange, sort of the way parents of an infant might be so accused for making baby sounds and using exaggerated facial expressions.

Now, it’s important to remember that these languages the disciples spoke that day were not strange babbling sounds, but recognizable languages. The point of the Pentecost experience is to assert again the universal nature of the Gospel. The disciples spoke in a variety of languages so that we might all understand that the good news of God’s forgiving nature and salvation is for everyone – rich and poor, people of every color and nationality. People who are saints and people who are sinners. There are no exceptions. There are no ifs, ands, or buts. God loves all mothers – oh, and fathers, and children as well.⁵

There’s no question this is a tough day to reference wind. Cyclones and tornadoes are on our minds this morning and the destruction they leave in their paths. I got to thinking about some of my experiences with damaging winds this past week. I remember the one that hit Addison, Michigan and my grandparents’ cottage on Round Lake – the weekends of going up there to help with cleanup and reconstruction – the stories of bathtubs in the lake. I remember the Palm Sunday tornadoes that hit near my northwestern Ohio hometown in the 60’s and I remember the Xenia tornado – I remember the frantic call from my grandparents concerned that they hadn’t heard from their two daughters whose homes were in the areas the news report talked about receiving the most damage – I remember getting up the next morning as a student at United Seminary and heading for Xenia with a truckload of supplies gathered the night before – I remember the roadblocks and finally successfully getting into the area and finding out about my aunts and their families.

Yes, I remembered this week the time we had to leave Myrtle Beach State Park campground as Hurricane Bob approached and I remembered the workcamp in South Dakota when high winds or a tornado destroyed our campsite and I remembered this week the mission trips to New Orleans to help with the continuing rebuilding effort there following Katrina’s powerful statement. And now, there’s the cyclone in Myanmar. There’s no question that the wind can be powerful – can wreak havoc on an area. But, sometimes some good winds blow into those situations caused by evil winds of nature – and some pretty amazing things happen. People get transformed when the good winds of the Holy Spirit move into our lives.

The real sign of the Holy Spirit is service. In one of King Duncan’s sermons he put it this way: “Simon Peter was transformed to serve. Some people who have an experience of the Spirit in their lives focus on the experience, and not on the call of God to service. The Holy Spirit did not come on the believers so they could sit around and congratulate themselves on their piety. The Holy Spirit did not come on them so they could form an exclusive club where only those who had the same experience would be welcome. The Holy Spirit came to them so that they could continue the work that Jesus had begun. And we are to do the same. We are not called here to share in some special privilege through the presence of the Holy Spirit, but to serve.”⁶

A journalist once became intrigued about the service one man performed for his community and so he interviewed the man. The man was particularly known for his outreach to those considered outcasts. He reached out to the homeless and those in prison and those who were HIV-positive.

The journalist asked him about his compassionate work. And the man said to the journalist, “The reason I do what I do is because of Jesus’ body language.”

“His body language?” the journalist asked.

“Yes, his body language,” responded the man. “Think about Jesus hanging on the cross. His arms are stretched to their fullest extent. Now I realize that his arms are stretched because they are nailed to the cross, but I deeply believe that his arms are stretched to their fullest extent not primarily because he is being crucified ... All his life, Jesus stretched out his arms to their fullest extent because that was the only way he could welcome absolutely everyone into the full embrace of God’s family.” And the man added, “And that needs to be our body language, too.”⁷

We have been called to assume the body language of Jesus. The Gospel is indeed for everyone. That’s the message of the cross and of Pentecost. Strangers from all over the known world heard the Gospel in their own language.

Earlier this week I sent Kasi Morris, the ministry team leader of one of our newest ministries: the CRC Sunday morning breakfasts, an email. April was Maple Grove’s month and I asked her how things went. She sent me the following email response: “I think it went really well, I had such a fun time. Not only did we get to know the people who come for breakfast but we got to know each other a little better too. There were 2 little girls there every time and by the end the littlest was starting to talk to all of us and we did arts and crafts with them. The guys who came to the shelter were all really nice and grateful for our help. We would all just sit and talk for about 2 hours; about the day, gardens, music, whatever. It was just nice I think for them to have someone who wanted to talk and hang out with them. I think I told you about the one time they all sang *Amazing Grace*, they sang it again along with some other songs on our last Sunday. I have always loved that song, but hearing everyone sing together and just thinking about what meaning it had to have for everyone was really heartwarming. I will definitely be going back to visit throughout the year, I will kind of miss not seeing them every week. It is funny to think that they had such an impact on me and I was only there for 3 Sundays. Hope you have a wonderful week!”

Tongues of fire dancing above the heads of people is an image that is tough for me to visualize and understand – but seeing people from different economic and life situations sitting down to breakfast together and enjoying one another’s company is evidence to me of the Holy Spirit’s presence and effect – it’s the gospel being proclaimed in a way the world can hear it and see it. I believe in the coming of the Holy Spirit – the experience at Pentecost – not because of the vision of dancing flames above the heads of the disciples but because of what the disciples went out and said and did as a result of what happened to them in that room. It was a new day for them – new dreams filled their hearts and minds – new strength, resolve, hope filled them. The church came alive and people became believers in the one who showed them a new way to understand God. Mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, inclusiveness, grace, hope, love, peace, joy became their way of life and people responded.

It was a cool summer night in Yankee Stadium. A foul ball was hit toward the lower left field stands. It was obvious that the about nine-year-old little boy sitting in that area had come to the game that night hoping for just such a moment. Cheap binoculars hung from his neck – an oversized Yankees’ cap was on top of his head – a small Little League glove worn only by a kid you’d only let play right field late in a game already decided covered his left hand.

The boy stretched out his gloved hand as the ball arched toward him. And then, a man about 35 reached over the boy knocking him to the ground and caught the ball. The man wore an expensive knit shirt and horn-rimmed glasses. The man broke the boy’s binoculars with his aggressive move. The mother tried to comfort the boy but the boy was clearly crushed.

After a couple of seconds of stunned silence, someone shouted: “Give the kid the ball!” Others chimed in: “Give the kid the ball!” With each shout more rows added their voice. Horn Rims just sat there and shook his head. The crowd really got inflamed when the man almost defiantly shoved the ball into his pocket. The “Give the kid the ball!” chant spread to center field and then to the right field stands. People who hadn’t even seen the thing were shouting.

And then, a man got up out of his seat and walked over to Horn Rims. He spoke some words to him – patiently and gently. Horn Rims hesitantly reached into his pocket and handed the ball to the kid. And the crowd roared: “He gave the kid the ball!”

And then things got really strange. Another foul ball was hit into the left field stands. The man who caught this ball walked over to Horn Rims and gave it to him. Horn Rims was obviously shocked and thanked him. And then another foul ball was caught. This one by a man in a muscle shirt sporting a Fu Manchu mustache. He turned and tossed the ball to the kid, who, to everyone’s delight and surprise, caught it. More enthusiastic applause was heard from the crowd who had gone to the ballpark that night to see a baseball game but witnessed instead a parable about justice and grace and experienced a spirit more wonderful than anything they could imagine. They learned that community could be experienced in ways they never imagined and when the spirit gets loose some pretty amazing things can happen. Yes, the community of Jesus Christ is much broader than anything we can imagine.⁸ God loves all mothers – and fathers – and children.

Let us pray.

1. Bill Watterson, The Essential Calvin and Hobbes, p. 130.
2. King Duncan, “Wide Enough for All (Mother’s Day),” Second Quarter 2008 Dynamic Preaching (ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 2008), 0-000-0000-20.
3. <http://www.cpcpc.bowiemd.org/documents/20060423DoubtVirus.doc>.
4. William Willimon, Pulpit Resource
5. King Duncan, “Wide Enough”.
6. King Duncan, “Sleeping Through a Tornado,” Collected Sermons: Dynamic Preaching, 2005, 0-000-0000-20.
7. J. Edwin Bacon, <http://www.allsaints-pas.org/sermons/3-24-02.pdf>. as quoted in King Duncan’s sermon “Wide Enough for All (Mother’s Day).”
8. Thomas G. Long, Whispering the Lyrics (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Company, 200), p.