

- Acts 2:1-21
- Psalm 104:24-35b

## ***Fired up!***

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, oh God, our strength and our redeemer.*

I've never been a fan of this Pentecost verse in Acts. The minute I start hearing about prophesy and fire and the moon turning to blood, I usually turn on my "that part of the bible doesn't apply to me, that's the conservative stuff" filter. I tuck it neatly away and feel confident that I could live my comfortable liberal UCC life without worrying about fire and brimstone and the coming of the Lord in the last days of the world.

So here I am, invited to preach in Kirkland, and I look at the lectionary and find this very scripture. Now what the heck am I supposed to do with this? As a side note, I should admit that Ana was very kind and offered me the option to pick any scripture that suited me. However, the only thing more intimidating than preaching about Pentecost to a congregation I hardly know, is having to pick my own scripture out of all the possible choices in the Bible! Besides, I am a firm believer that things happen for a reason, so if this is the scripture that was chosen, I'd better sit down and figure out what I might be able to learn from it!

First, I should offer a bit of context. The reason I am here today is because I am in graduate school. And as part of my graduate program, I had to put together a degree committee. So I searched far and wide for some learn-ed people who could help guide me on my path to discern what I will make of myself and how I can use this graduate school time to finally figure out once and for all what I want to be when I grow up!

Ana Gobledale is one of those learned people on my degree committee and when she invited me to preach, I felt both honored as well as just a bit beholden to accept! It's the least I can do since she's so generously offered her time to me!

As part of my graduate work, I am learning to decipher what it is that I bring to my work. How can I offer my skills as a leader in the church, my community, my family and what is it about those skills that are unique?

I've always been one to believe that you have to separate your work-life from your home-life and especially from your church-life. I mean let's face it, unless you work at a church, it's just not appropriate to bring religion into the workplace. At work, you leave the things that are truly important to you: your faith, love and passions and focus on business, whatever that business is. Imagine my surprise when I arrived at school and the first thing I'm told is that if I'm not bringing my whole self to my work: my faith and values and passions, I can not hope to find my true calling. As a matter of fact, the core focus of this graduate program is to define my calling or vocation. The definition we use is from Frederick Buechner who defines vocation as "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's greatest needs". So suddenly I find myself trying to figure out how to blend those parts of me that are deeply personal and meaningful such as my faith, my values and my understanding of the world and create a career, or a vocation based on this combination. (Why this revelation was such a shock to me, the daughter of a minister and a school teacher who have given their lives to the service of others, I can't begin to say. However, I have to admit that once I grasped this idea, it felt both natural and just a little bit decadent to contemplate how to I could bring my whole, true, passionate self to any work that I might choose)

So I come to you today as a student. A student struggling to find my own path in the world. Studying to learn how I can bring my strengths into a career that will bring meaning to myself and to others. And a student of the written word, both sacred and secular.

The writer of Acts tells us the story:

*And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'*

How do we as students of this scripture embrace pentacost and spread the word of God's love without feeling like we are pushing our beliefs on others? How do we truly welcome all who we encounter "no matter who they are or where they are on lifes' journey"?

How can we be leaders in today's church? Here in the UCC we are often told that we are all to be ministers to each other and to the world. But most of us don't actually embrace that idea. Some of **you**, I'm sure, do. However, I know that when I hear those words, I don't run out and evangelize or even go visit the sick or elderly. I sometimes feel guilty about this, but I console myself with the belief that others, much more skilled in this area than I, will tend to the sick and elderly and I will do my part by offering my financial support to the church, which will in turn allow others to do this important work. (And then I walk away with just a smidgen of guilt.)

But what if that is exactly what is supposed to happen? There **are** people in our church, and I'm sure there are in yours as well that feel called to visit the sick or call on the elderly. Some arrange rides for those who no are longer able to transport themselves. Still others forgoe the sermon to teach the children in Sunday School. Perhaps, I only need to feel guilty if I am not offering the skills and abilities that are natural to me. Perhaps the way we are all ministers to each other and to the world is by understanding what we do well and offering that very skill in service of others.

So now, if I ask you to be a minister to the world, the request shifts focus. I am not asking you to be Christlike in such a way as you copy him and perform the very same acts of kindness that Christ offered, but to be Christlike by listening to God's unique calling for you and responding to that calling with joy.

This I believe is the essence of leadership. John Quincy Adams *once said: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."* Leadership is more than standing in front of the church and telling others what to do, or what to believe, it is identifying what makes you special and using those strengths in the service of others.

By taking the time to truly understand what you bring to the world – your unique strengths, and then committing to use those strengths to the best of your ability to make your community, company, church or city a better place – you are celebrating God’s gifts and spreading the news that God is indeed still speaking through you.

In the scripture, the apostles are sitting around having a conversation much like they might do on any given evening, in the common language of Galilee. Suddenly, a sound sweeps through the room like a violent wind and each person begins speaking a different language given to him by the Spirit. But this is just the beginning. Not only are they all speaking new and different languages, but they still can understand each other. Even the crowds that gather, with people from every nation can understand them, but they hear their words in their own language. It’s like a massive UN translation service! Suddenly, the apostles become free to allow their God-given talents, or true selves to be revealed and when they do so, they are understood, even by strangers in the crowd. Now there are those naysayers in the crowd that accuse them of being drunk. Why else would they be acting so crazy and different speaking these wild and new languages? But Peter points out that not only are they not drunk, but they are finally able to “see visions” and “dream dreams”.

Breaking out of the “same as everybody else” mold and embracing your gifts is hard and it’s risky. People might accuse you of acting different than, or worse, drunk. But if you are willing to risk, you gain the possibility of seeing visions, of dreaming dreams. Perhaps you gain the possibility of making those dreams come true, of making a significant positive impact in the lives of others.

So back to those flames (because it’s really not fair to skip that part). To me, if I’m looking at the scripture through this lens of embracing our unique strengths and skills, the flames might now represent passion. What is your passion? What fires you up? If we each were to tap into our true selves, speak our native tongue and embrace those areas in which we are most passionate, how would that look? If we took the time to understand our God-given strengths and offered them to

the world with all the passion of a Fired-Up Sunday preacher, wouldn't this world seem just a bit closer to heaven? Wouldn't we all feel a bit closer to God?

Perhaps there's more to this pentacostal scripture than I was willing to consider. Huh, guess it just goes to show you...as long as I'm willing to listen, God is indeed still speaking!

I had the great pleasure of listening to Mary Oliver read some of her poems on Tuesday evening. Mary has offered her gifts to the world through her poetry and a number of those poems speak to me. I offer you one of my favorites:

## **The Summer Day**

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

**Tell me, what is it you plan to do**

**with your one wild and precious life?**

So what does fire you up? What speaks so deeply to you that you can't help but want to share it with the world? What gives you childlike wonder and excitement? That is what I invite you to remember: to embrace that feeling and offer your true self in service to others. God calls us to prophesy, to see visions, and to dream dreams. It is only then that we are truly living God's calling. What is it you plan to do with your one wild & precious life?

Amen

## Acts 2:1-21

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>‘In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Psalm 104:24-35b

O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
<sup>25</sup>Yonder is the sea, great and wide,  
creeping things innumerable are there,  
living things both small and great.  
<sup>26</sup>There go the ships,  
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

<sup>27</sup>These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
<sup>28</sup>when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
<sup>29</sup>When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.  
<sup>30</sup>When you send forth your spirit, \* they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.

<sup>31</sup>May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;  
may the Lord rejoice in his works—  
<sup>32</sup>who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke.  
<sup>33</sup>I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.  
<sup>34</sup>May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
for I rejoice in the Lord.  
<sup>35</sup>Let sinners be consumed from the earth,  
and let the wicked be no more.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.  
Praise the Lord!