

All Together in the Spirit
Psalm 104: 24-35
Acts 2:1-21
May 15, 2016
Fort Hill Presbyterian Church
Clemson, SC

I have always believed in miracles. I think that the modern day advancement of contact lenses is a miracle. That I can put a small piece of flexible material on my eyeball, and see the leaves on the trees, instead of just a forest—I count that a miracle.

About twelve years ago I was at a meeting at Louisville Seminary for a few days. We began each day with morning prayer. On the day I was to lead, I arrived at the Laws Lodge chapel early. This chapel is not the main one on campus but a smaller one on the side of the continuing education building. **It is in the shape of a long narrow wedge, two stories high and made of glass on three sides. It looks out into a forest, filled with all shapes and sizes of trees.** It was springtime and every shade of green was bursting forth from branches on high.

The morning psalm was 150. As the trees swayed I could hear them moaning in the wind. **“Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!”** I was watching the word of God take life. **“Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!”** It was great. To see these oaks and maples, and

poplars giving God such praise with their very lives in what appeared to be an impending storm was astounding. For a moment I wondered if I should take cover in another hall. **“Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!”** As I watched I wondered how the trees would do that, but they did as the wind moved them into twisting and turning like instruments in hand. **“Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!”** The dance was made real by a few birds who could not manage to land at all, and two squirrels flying from tree to tree, then branch to trunk, and then safely to the ground where they continued to swirl, playing in with the wind. The pipes were squeaks as branches and trunks brushed back and forth against one another. **“Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!”** That’s when the blossoms from the tulip poplars started flying and a few hit the window. Talk about being invited into the worship of God. **“Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!”**

And I did. We did. Our psalm today invites us, to praise God too. Praise God for the magnificent works God does in creation, praise God for even making the sea monsters playful. Praise God for providing food, and creating every living thing. This creation, this praise is God’s glory that endures forever!

And in our Acts story the wind takes over like a gale force transforming all around it. Not only is there a powerful wind, but fire and lots of noise. **Imagine the fear as tongues of fire appear on each disciple's head.** As if that wasn't enough, people from all over the known world begin to hear others speaking in their own languages.

Now another miracle that I have experienced has to do with languages. By the time I got around to answering yes to God to go to seminary I was 44 years old. What I was most worried about was learning Hebrew and Greek with an old brain. Languages are supposed to be learned when one is young. **But I decided that if God wanted me to learn them, then God was going to have to do one of those miracles. So I prayed asking God to help me like the languages and learn more about God through them. Hebrew was first. I actually found it to be beautiful, lyrical, symbolic, small, and clever. What was difficult for me with Hebrew was seeing those added jots and tittles that are the vowel markings. Studying Hebrew gave me presbyopia, or elder eyes. I had become a true Presbyterian!**

But it was possible. With God's help, I learned Hebrew. And I learned Greek too, thanks to God and my professor Dr. Sadler and my high school Latin teacher Mrs. Hinson. Making it through seminary takes a village. If anyone tells you otherwise, be suspicious of them.

Making it through that first Pentecost took a village too. While the Holy Spirit lighted on each person there, the work of the people involved one another. The Spirit gave voice to the people and gave birth to the Church, the people of God, the body of Christ. By the Spirit, God works through all people. And by the Spirit, all the people praised God. In fact, all of creation praises God with the Spirit. That's what the word *Hallelujah* means. *All praise God!* The Spirit gives life-breath, and renews life-energy.

Part of what makes us humans is that God made us to be together. We need one another, we need to praise God together. What happened at Pentecost was not confusion, but celebration. The languages being heard were not those as spoken of elsewhere in the Bible when Paul writes about persons speaking in tongues. Those needed an interpreter. Here in Acts, people are speaking and being understood by those who are listening. The Spirit moves through voice and listening. The activity here is proclamation. It is very much like our confirmation students professing their faith today. Speaking in language that we can understand. Tell us what you know and believe and hope about God and all that God is and how we come to know God.

Read from Will's Statement of Faith.

The Church comforts, teaches, and guides. **These are also the functions of the Holy Spirit, to comfort, teach and guide the Church in God's mission.** The mission of the church is not about anything glamorous or powerful, but rather to become faithful witnesses of God's love for the world.

Jack Levison, is a biblical scholar who has studied the Holy Spirit perhaps more than any other scholar. In his book, *Fresh Air—The Holy Spirit for an Inspired Life* he notes that throughout the Bible,

- The spirit is known to be in every human being who can cultivate the wisdom of the spirit through simplicity and faithfulness.
- The spirit is particularly present not in the status quo but in social upheaval. (Caution streamers.)
- The spirit inspires whole communities.
- The spirit drives the faithful into arenas of hostility. (Danger too.)
- The spirit simultaneously inspires ecstasy and restraint, study and spontaneity.”

When it comes to why Levison attends church, this is the answer he gives to a dear friend who is not a Christian. Read from pages 26-28.

Like that little song from childhood.

“I am the church. You are the church.
We are the church together.
All who follow Jesus, all around the world!
Yes! We’re the church together.”

The church has never been about the building, but about the people.
The buildings that God has provided for this church (people of God), are
for God’s mission. **But it is still the Church, the people of God, who are
the vessels of God’s love in the world today.**

We are better together, when we are all together in the spirit. **When
we are all together in one place as the Acts story describes.** See you
back here next Sunday. Better yet, see you here every Sunday.

May we build up the body of Christ together! Hallelujah!