
Pentecost Meditation 2010

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Meditations for the 50 days of Easter 2010

The Cathedral of St. Philip

Atlanta, Georgia

Acts 2:1-21 " John 15:26-27;16:4b-15

"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?" (Acts 2:6-9)

We had heard it all before.

She walked out on stage with a seemingly unwarranted confidence. "I'm going to rock this crowd," she said.

But, she was too much. What should have been straight was frizzy. What should have been thin was thick. What should have been tight was loose. You could hear the echoes of past judgments" a German accent declaring her the "weakest link"; an American accent confirming that she had been voted off of the island; an English accent condemning her as not worthy of the stage on which she was standing.

Soon there were whispers, snickers, and the almost audible rolling of eyes. She was a 47-year-old unemployed Scot, living alone with her cat, Pebbles. She had never been married and, she claimed, never been kissed.

Then, Susan Boyle began to sing.

The words of "I Dreamed a Dream" from Les Misérables seemed to come alive in her voice. By the time she got to the second verse, the crowd was on its feet. Jeers became cheers. And the applause continued long after she finished.

The judges seemed to experience their own conversion. They voted unanimously to move her on to the next round of the competition. One judge confessed to hearing the "biggest wake-up call ever."

Suddenly, we couldn't get enough. Tens of millions of people watched the YouTube video of her performance on the show Britain's Got Talent. Millions bought copies of her first album. She appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show and Larry King Live.

They said it was the quality of her voice, or the courage of her performance, or the surprise of her talent. These things are all true, of course. But they don't explain the tears. They don't qualify as "wake-up calls." One of the judges, Simon Cowell, came closer to the truth. He admitted that when he heard Susan Boyle sing, he saw her as a "human being" for the first time. "You become part of a mob," he said, and then "you realize that you've gone too far."

We might call this a Pentecost moment. If we listen closely, we can hear the gentle blowing of the Spirit that gives meaning to the "Alleluias" we shouted so enthusiastically on Easter morning.

Pentecost is a celebration of the miracle of the tongue—the gift of the Spirit that allows the Gospel to be proclaimed. But it is also a celebration of the miracle of the ear—the gift of the Spirit that allows the Gospel to be heard. We might say that Susan Boyle experienced a miracle of the tongue. She found the courage to proclaim her humanity in the face of those who seemed so eager to take it from her.

But we experienced a miracle of the ear. We heard her voice and, to our joy, realized that she was one of us after all.

It's a mysterious thing, really, that what appears to be the weakest link turns out to be the only thing that is holding the human chain together.

The Rev. Canon George Maxwell

George joined the St. Philip's staff at the beginning of 2005. He is the Vicar of the Cathedral. In addition to his teaching, preaching, and pastoral duties, George is responsible for the operations of St. Philip's and the development of its staff, programs, and ministries.