
How Filled With Awe Is This Place And We Did Not Know It!

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
The Day of Pentecost – Year B**

Unedited transcript:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart find favor in your sight, oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen. The day of Pentecost is finally here and we know it's a day for celebration because there's a choir and they're singing. We're back. We're back to the place where we hear things we hadn't heard before and say things that haven't been said before. So let's go back to that day of Pentecost, where the apostles were gathered with all of the nations, it seems, in Jerusalem to celebrate an ancient feast. It was the day on which the first fruits of harvest were celebrated when the nation of Israel had made its way from the bonds of slavery in Egypt to the freedom that they would experience at the foot of Mount Sinai. They were still in the wilderness, of course, but it was from the top of Mount Sinai that Torah would be revealed, that the law that gave them their identity would come forth. It is a day of celebration.

Now, the apostles have been through a tough time. They've been through their own wilderness experience. Jesus has been crucified. And while he appeared again several times after the resurrection, he is now gone the way of Elijah perhaps, into the clouds. The spirit of truth has returned as Jesus promised and it would not be too much to think that what the apostles really wanted was some new knowledge, some new thing that would help make sense of all that they had experienced. They would take this disorder and miraculously make order out of it, showing them the way forward. That's usually what we want the spirit of truth to do, isn't it, to prove that we were right and show us how we can go forward. So it would be fair and understandable for this to be what they wanted, a revelation of something new, but that's not what they got.

They did get a revelation. The spirit of truth did appear and things did suddenly appear in a different light, but it wasn't because there was something that they didn't know, they already knew what they needed to know about Jesus. They already knew what they needed to know about God. They already knew what they needed to know about the spirit, they just didn't know they knew. And it was the spirit of truth who revealed that to them, that revealed that what they already knew was enough, they just had to act on it. They just had to find it in themselves, speak out of that place.

And Peter begins to preach and they go forth as apostles, as evangelists to help others find in themselves what they were shown by Jesus. The spirit of truth is in fact, the great revealer. So we don't come to this day of Pentecost to celebrate the spirit, we come to celebrate what the spirit revealed, the truth that we already know what we need to know about God, we just have to find it. Now I find some comfort in this. We have spent the last year in our own wilderness. Ironically, I actually preached last Pentecost, albeit in an online service. And you may remember that there were protests in the streets when you were watching that service. And you may remember how the summer turned out when there were lots of voices that we hadn't heard before, not all of which I wanted to hear. And lots of things that were said before that I understood all too well, then that rolled into the fall where the election cycles seemed to provide the same experience. We're still talking about that election actually.

Oh yeah, and did I mention the pandemic, because that was going on at the same time. So it would be understandable for us all to want, now on this day of Pentecost, some new revelation that would make sense of all of this, take this disorder and make it into order and get rid of this disequilibrium that we are currently

experiencing. But the message of this day is that we already know what we need to know. We already have the presence of God in us. We simply need to find it.

Rachel Remen, the dispenser of kitchen table wisdom, who also wrote a book called *My Grandfather's Blessing* tells a story that captures this point, I think. She was at a convention with a number of other physicians, most of whom were cardiologists. And at this convention, they were asked by a speaker to engage in an exercise. Take your stethoscopes, the speaker said, off of your necks and put them in your ears and on your heart and listen to your own heart. Remen says that all the cardiologists did just what you would expect them to do. They all got really quiet and they began listening with great anxiety for what was wrong. They began to worry about sounds they didn't want to hear, things that weren't beating the way they should.

And then as the exercise continued, the silence somehow got deeper as their attention changed, as they move from being physicians to themselves, attempting to diagnose particular problems or potential difficulties and became aware of the mystery of life, became aware that this heart beating inside of them, which they had nothing to do with, it was there before they were actually born, was the source of their life. They were completely dependent upon it and it was mysterious. She said that everything changed. And as they came out of the exercise and began to talk among themselves, the tone of conversation was different. Curiosity had replaced some of the expert knowing that you might have expected to be there. Some compassion and ability to listen had replaced the desire to talk and to dominate to conversation. People were open to each other in a new and different way. And there was a sense of joy that they felt. At one point in attempting to explain this, a physician recalled a prayer that he had heard long before. He began to recite it. It goes like this.

Days pass and the years vanish, we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing, let there be moments when your presence like lightning illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see wherever we gaze that the bush burns unconsumed and that we, clay, touched by God may reach out for a holiness and exclaim in wonder how filled with awe is this place and we did not know it. How filled with awe is this place and we did not know it. That, I think, captures the gift of this day. That, I think, captures the revelation of Pentecost. How filled with awe is this place and we did not know it.

For you see, I am convinced that the answer to our racial struggles, that the answer to the pandemic, that the answer to our political polarization is right here with us in this place, that it starts with a sense of awe at the presence of God. You know that awe, that thing that makes us small and opens us up, that sense of being loved by God, that we often experience from other people, but can ultimately find on our own that brings us out of ourselves, that makes us more curious than needing to be right. That makes us able to listen than having to speak, which gives us compassion to people that we didn't even see before. It starts right here in community where the spirit of truth reveals the truth to us.

I must say, as I stand here, I am just amazed at the images that come back to me. I remember Robert falling asleep over there at Christmas Eve service. I remember washing Mary Hunter's feet right there on [inaudible 00:11:11] Thursday. I remember baptizing a grandfather and his grandchild on Easter morning at the vigil. I remember my father's name being read on All Saints Day. I remember walking in here randomly one morning when someone was there, their wife's just having been diagnosed with a terminal illness and they just wanted to pray. I remember a prayer service for a very conservative governor. I remember a liberal almost tent revival for a very liberal Lutheran pastor all right here, all in this community. I remember the homeless requiem. And I remember all the youth sermons that have been preached from this pulpit because it was here with you in these moments, whether we were laughing or crying, that we found God. That we came to realize as we stood here together, that we were loved by God. We heard things we had not heard before. We said things that we had not said before, because the spirit revealed them to us in community.

Our path forward is not easy, but neither was it for the Israelites. Yet it begins, I think, here in this space together, loving each other, looking for and finding and sharing the presence of God, what it means to be loved. Days pass and the years vanish, we walked sightless among miracles.

Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing that there be moments when your presence like lightning, illumines, the darkness in which we walk. help us to see wherever we gaze that the bush burns unconsumed and we, clay, touched by God will reach out for holiness and exclaim and wonder, how filled with awe is this place and we did not know it. How filled with awe is this place and we did not know it. Amen.