

“Cosmic Rummage Sale”  
Acts 2:1-21

Every year our deacons in this church take on the massive job of putting a rummage sale together. They call it “Treasure Sale,” but it really is a rummage sale. They encourage people to do some spring cleaning to get rid of the things we have accumulated over the years and which we do not need any more. Every time we go through this process of cleaning for a rummage sale, we feel literally liberated from the junk we accumulate. I know that is true for me because I am then able to organize my space better and have more room for more stuff! Well today with Pentecost, I would like to invite us to a spiritual rummage sale and spring cleaning. If we do this in our homes once a year, we avoid years of accumulation and the task becomes easier each year. The same is true of our faith. Year after year, we accumulate stuff that we don't necessarily need but somehow that stuff becomes part of the faith. So today is an invitation and a challenge to allow the Holy Spirit that blew on the day of Pentecost to blow into your life to do some spring cleaning. The day of Pentecost for the early church as recorded in the Book of Acts was an incredible day of spring cleaning for the church.

There were Jews gathered from every ethnic group known in that time who were in Jerusalem for the festival of the first fruit which usually happened fifty days after Passover which is why we have the word Pentecost. It simply means “fifty days” in Greek. This was one of the three major festivals for the people of Israel when they harvested the wheat in the spring and then would gather in the Temple to make their offerings and share their abundance with those in need so that no one was left poor or hungry. On that day, among the Jews who were in Jerusalem celebrating Pentecost in Jerusalem were the followers of Jesus. Yet, something extraordinary happened to them. What was an ordinary, worship as usual event, became a life transforming experience. They had an incredible experience of the Holy Spirit that felt like the rushing of a mighty wind and tongues of fire. It was such a powerful spiritual experience that some of the people who saw them react to it thought that they were drunk. What is interesting in all of this is not just the mystical aspect of this experience, the ecstatic expression of the Spirit. What is amazing is the clean up job which the Spirit did on that day. The divisions of race, gender, language, and class were so deeply embedded in that culture that it was hard for people to work together and to see value in those who were labeled as the other. That part of the world was very much tribal in its orientation. Even though the Roman Empire was the big umbrella under which many cultures existed, the divisions between these cultures were deeply rooted. This kind of cleaning was especially painful for the followers of Jesus at that time because the Holy Spirit was pushing them to get rid of the old hatreds and conflicts to cross over national and faith boundaries to work with those who were so different from them. The work of the Spirit at Pentecost was seen as a reversal of the curse of Babel with the division of languages for humans in Genesis 11. This was such a formative experience for the early church because it was so similar to the experience of Moses in receiving the Law where God was seen in fire and smoke. This was another experience of liberation, the Spirit of God moving people to new dimensions of freedom and this new freedom meant that people who did not understand each other before are now speaking to each other and divisions of race and culture are broken down. What an amazing spring clean-up job! Usually when people do some spring clean up they go with the easy and accessible things first, not the attic where really old boxes are deeply hidden! But that is not what the Holy Spirit did. The Holy Spirit started at the root of many problems in our world namely the hate and fear of those who are different from us.

I like the Celtic image of the Holy Spirit because it speaks more truly to the wild nature of the Spirit. Celtic Christians in Ireland chose the wild goose as a symbol representing the Holy Spirit. A wild goose is one noisy, bothersome bird. I like this image of the Holy Spirit as a wild

goose because it jars us out of our complacency. Normally we use the image of a dove for the Holy Spirit which is biblical but a goose can convey this depth of the power and wildness of the Spirit and the lesson is very clear. With the Spirit as a wild goose, we know that if allowed it in, things will never be the same in our lives; old things may get tossed out, things that we held on so dearly for many years, things that are deeply hidden in the attics of our lives.

So, let's imagine for a few moments what this wild force of the Holy Spirit might do if you truly let it into your life. What hatreds or grudges might it clean? What old tapes of self-pity or negative self-talk would it throw away? What prejudices might it purge from your old mental files? What about our church and our world? What are some of the beliefs that are no longer helpful to us and that only separate us from others and deprive us of the ability to work with our neighbors for common goals? The early church was an inclusive faith where people of all walks of life, religions, theologies, ethnicities, and social classes were welcomed and felt that their diversity was not a hindrance but a blessing. Yet, the church over the centuries has grown more exclusive and limited in its outlook. Even the table of communion, the table of Christ's welcoming love has become a place of exclusion.

In her book, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle says that the church every 500 years or so must undergo a "garage sale" of some sort. She, and others, look at the church today and see the possibility that we are in fact in the middle of one of those cosmic, inspired, rummage sales: a refocusing of our hearts and minds on what the good news means in our own day, while honoring the contributions of those who have gone before us. Tickle and others see this as a time of great renewal for the church and the churches, an opportunity for re-examination of the fundamental questions and a re-commitment to a renewed living of our faith. Is it perhaps a time for our "sons and daughters to prophesy", for our "young to dream dreams and our old to see visions", for an outpouring of Spirit that calls from tomorrow overwhelming our preconceived notions and neat perceptions in favor of the expansive and inclusive reign of God.

It is an exciting time in our world today because we are going through a major spring cleaning with the Spirit of God leading it to help us be more centered on God's love and sharing it with our neighbors, both friends and strangers. The question is always before us on how to be open to the Spirit of God. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we can see the places of resistance we have for such cleaning. We may be able to let go of the stuff on the surface, the stuff that does not really matter, but the old pain we have carried so long is so much harder to release. In her book, *Encountering God*, Diana Eck describes the creative ways Christians in the Middle Ages symbolized their openness to the Spirit of Pentecost. She says that some churches had "Holy Spirit holes" in the ceiling. On Pentecost, doves were released through the holes and bundles of rose petals were dropped from them onto the people. What a powerful reminder to the church about our need to be open to the Spirit!

The great news about spring cleaning is not only getting rid of old and useless things. It is also about creating room for new things that are more useful for us. The Holy Spirit of Pentecost did not only get rid of old divisions and problems, it also brought new opportunities to the life of the Church. It brought a new vitality and zeal for mission and for human connections. The Spirit of Pentecost was what allowed the church to spread the message of God's love to the ends of the earth. If it weren't for that experience, Christianity would have stayed as a local faith that never went beyond ancient Palestine. The Spirit of Pentecost brought people together in such a powerful way that it broke the social barriers of the time.

A great example of how the Holy Spirit is breaking down barriers between people comes to us from Portland, Oregon. Right now the city is preparing its 8<sup>th</sup> annual ten-day "Building

Convergence Festival.” This is a great project that is promoted by a group called City Repair. The festival features workshops and neighborhood improvement projects all around the city. According to a recent article from Seasons of the Spirit, “The festival is an outgrowth of an effort that began with a small group of people reclaiming their own street intersection – painting a design in the street, building a child’s playhouse, installing a bench and a kiosk for sharing neighborhood information. Soon they had an interactive social space. Soon after this first project, the volunteer-run nonprofit City Repair was organizing neighborhood groups throughout the city, eventually with the blessing of the mayor and city council. Their goal is to create gathering places in street intersections. One new project is Depave Portland, which removes unnecessary asphalt to make space for urban gardens. City Repair Project co-founder Mark Lakeman, an urban planner, says that people have lost the connections they used to have when they lived and worked in the same place. People had regular opportunities to interact with their neighbors as they went about their daily lives, which gave people in a community ‘cultural cohesion.’ ‘We weren’t isolated the way that we are now,’ Lakeman said, adding that today ‘many of our phobias and issues come from separating the pieces of our lives.’ As he traveled, Lakeman saw that people’s gathering places were where their pathways came together and intersected. He began to see that the idea of crossroads is ancient – it pervades indigenous societies. Today we try to keep people moving, instead of encouraging them to gather as they would in a village. ‘In America,’ Lakeman says, ‘our great archetype is the main street, which is not really a center. It’s just a flow. It’s a movement corridor... There isn’t a social commons that you can attain and occupy.’ In Portland more and more neighborhoods are ‘repairing their intersections,” creating social commons, places where people can and do meet and gather. ‘The power of what we do,’ Lakeman says, ‘is we start with the idea and the belief that we can make it happen. If it has a social basis, if your primary goal is to build networks and relationships, then you attract all the other forms of capital that begin with the social. That’s the magic. That’s the key.’”

May we have the courage to repair the intersections of our lives and allow more space for the Holy Spirit to clear the messes of our lives and of our world! May we truly be ready for the spring cleaning of the Spirit. Amen.