

## A SERMON FROM ST STEPHEN'S

# TUNE IN

*A sermon preached by the Rev'd Christine Trainor, Associate Rector, at St Stephen's Church, Belvedere, CA, 31st May 2020, Pentecost Sunday. Based on the Collect of the Day.*

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“Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of the Holy Spirit...”

I have been having very weird dreams during this time of the COVID pandemic. Vivid and symbolic, I pay attention to them because they help me understand how I am processing these unprecedented times. Thursday night, in my dream, I found myself standing in an outdoor stadium packed with people, huddled together, no social distancing. It was gray, and chilly. I was preaching to the crowd. A Pentecost sermon. In a halting voice.

I held forth about the power of the Holy Spirit. I was nervous. The words were not coming easily. I wasn't sure what to say next. It is not too difficult to interpret that dream!

I think a lot of us are feeling a relentless, untethered anxiety right now. Surpassing 100,000 deaths from the virus in our nation this week. Escalating violence, racially charged unrest. Devastating news on the economy and job loss. A growing hostility over opening for business and wearing masks. Another week, and still we cannot gather in person. I miss hugs and handshakes and supportive squeezes.

In his sermon last Sunday, and in his article in *Tidings* this week, Father Ellsworth suggested the theme of exile as a way of thinking about this time as the people of God. That image, and its solid grounding in our Judaic roots, really resonated with me.

It resonated because of the similarities I see between this time for us and that time for the Hebrews—a time of exile that followed from a cataclysmic crash of the prevailing economic, political, religious, cultural, and social structure—a crash that had been predicted by the prophets and

for which they had been amply warned. In exile, the Hebrew people struggled to maintain their identity, even when they were dispersed. They lived by a certain ethos, even in environments very different, and often hostile, to their values.

During exile, they too were unable to go to the physical building of the temple. Unable to worship in the temple, they were compelled to develop new ways of forming community and worshipping God.

By virtue of the pandemic, people are reassessing their lives. The church is having to drastically pivot operations; to reconsider entrenched attitudes and practices; to dream about new and imaginative ways that communities can come together and grow.

When the promised Spirit descends upon the people on that first Pentecost, things get messy. At first there is chaos. Is the wind blowing up a hurricane? Is the house burning? Are the people drunk? Before long, bewilderment shifts to amazement as the confused throng starts to recognize their mother tongues.

Pentecost shows that what unites us is more important than what divides us. Pentecost was a miracle of hearing, of comprehension, of listening. That characteristic should give us pause in these days when so many people strain to shout their views at others, but seldom try to listen. The church's birth is constituted in listening to one another, especially those who speak and think differently, especially those whose voices are marginalized or silenced.

I had a long talk with my teen-aged daughter yesterday. The talk with her made me change the end

of this sermon. She said it would be okay if I told you about it.

I mostly listened as she choked through tears of anxiety, fear, and outrage. Our conversation started with her fury about the death of George Floyd; that this keeps happening, and we just inure ourselves to it, and move on.

The year she was born, the Twin Towers collapsed on 9/11 and the world changed forever. In her short lifetime, 20 six and seven-year-olds were shot and killed at Sandy Hook; people jogging, watching TV in their living room, sleeping in their own beds are being killed for being Black; We focus on short-term gains at the expense of ecological, geopolitical, and economic balances. Kleptocracy and greed rule at the highest levels. The list goes on and on...

Some of us may feel more insulated from these events, but we are all impacted because they erode our humanity. Doing nothing corrodes our souls. I hear people looking to the next generation, to Gen Y, to Gen Z to fix these problems. But that is not their responsibility. We should all be doing something NOW.

How? By listening. By showing up. By using our power and privilege to amplify the voices of those who aren't given a voice.

You could tune out. But you have tuned in this

morning, because you care. At some point, you heard a compelling story in a language you could understand, and that story shapes how you live, and move, and have your being in the world. In the crazy dream I had on Thursday, I was anxious that I would not have the right words to say to the crowds.

Maybe I don't have the right words for you this morning—I am coming off as too strident or political. But our integrity and values are at stake. Our souls are at stake. The world we are creating for our children is at stake. As the world gets ever more deeply inter-twined, your behavior and values matter more than ever.

To move this story of Pentecost off the pages and into our lives, the Spirit equips each of us, with the words to speak up, and to speak out. Convicted, we spread the good news. And we listen, listen, listen deeply, meeting the image of God in others, recognizing the Spirit in them as that self-same Spirit in us. So that there is no longer "them and us."

The Holy Spirit is doing something mysterious and wonderful among the people of God. Whenever you come to God in prayer or share compassion and caring with another, whenever you take a stand for justice, wherever you proclaim the love of Christ, in word or deed, as the overriding, all-consuming purpose of life, you are part of that fiery momentum.

*During Covidtide and beyond, St Stephen's Church invites you to worship with us by subscribing to YouTube/StStephensBelvedere. We livestream Sunday services every weel at 10 o'clock Pacific Time. You'll also find other communications from us there.*

*For more information about our life and mission, and how to connect with us as we gather virtually, please visit our website at [ststephenschurch.org](http://ststephenschurch.org). Let us know how to pray for you by emailing us at [info@ststephenschurch.org](mailto:info@ststephenschurch.org). And please, remember us in your prayers.*