

“Fear, Anxiety, Boldness, and Power”

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Text: Acts 2:1-21

We have spent this Easter season with the theme, “Behind closed doors.” We started with the story of the disciples meeting and praying after Jesus has been executed. Jesus appears to the friends and doubting Thomas, behind those closed doors. And then, throughout the season, we have explored the household economies of the ancient world. We peered behind those closed doors to see what it looked like for widows, like Lydia, who made purple cloth. We looked at how much the biblical stories were built upon slavery and liberation. We saw how all of society could be restructured through the simple act of eating and how the Christians in the early church worked to do that. We talked about tenacious mothers who demanded that God provide for their children. And we looked behind that closed door, when Jesus prayed that we would be one.

And this Sunday, it’s Pentecost, we find ourselves behind closed doors again, as the disciples gather for the Jewish Festival of Weeks. It’s a Harvest Festival. But before we jump into Pentecost, I think we have to acknowledge what’s been going on our lives this week.

The news has been absolutely overwhelming. We hit that dreadful marker of 100,000 deaths, as the Coronavirus continues to ravage the country. Tensions have been mounting for weeks, as we have learned how the virus is devastating people of color. They’re often the men and women who work on the front lines, in high-risk areas, like meat processing plants. Many people have pre-existing conditions, which put them more at risk.

Then, the unemployment numbers have rolled in. Each month, we think that they’ll get better, but they keep climbing, as people have had to shutter their businesses and lay off employees.

Our worlds connect with so many tragedies and we are trying to deal with them, without our usual resources. We cannot gather with our friends for solace. We cannot mourn the death of loved ones by gravesides. We cannot hop on a plane to visit our relatives. We grieve in isolation. We cannot celebrate birthdays, graduations and milestones together. We cannot plan for what’s ahead. We are not able to meet in church with one another. And we feel this fear and anxiety constantly gnawing at us.

Then, on top of all of this, the deaths of three African Americans shocked our country. Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot while running through his neighborhood; Breonna Taylor, who was shot in her home in the middle of the night during a police raid; and George Floyd, who was killed while an officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes as he begged for his life. The tensions and string

of events have set off protests all over our country. People have been demanding justice for Arbery, Taylor, and Floyd. Anti-fascists, Black Bloc, and anarchist have set fire to buildings. And many of us watch and pray as we see what is happening, worried about people's lives, the property, the exposure to the corona virus.

We all know our history. In a society, when racial divides fester, when inequities mount, when people cannot work, or when their work becomes deadly, when people are worried about feeding their families, people rise up. They protest and they revolt.

And here, in the church, we celebrate Pentecost. It is the birthday of the church. In some ways it feels incongruous. Normally, we would be wearing our red ties and jackets. We would have steamers flying in the air and birthday cake. Instead, we're behind our closed doors. And we cannot ignore the mourning that our country is going through collectively. It's difficult and exhausting to take it all in, to reconcile everything that has happened. As we've been sheltering in place, the injustices in our country have been laid bare before us.

The disciples are also behind closed doors--gathering and praying. They're not home, in rural Galilee, but they gather in the city of Jerusalem, a place where people came together from all over the region. It was a very urban place, where people spoke all different languages.

They must be afraid. They watched, as Jesus stood on the mountainside, and ascended to heaven. He told them that they needed to be witnesses to Jerusalem and Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And he said that he would always be with them, right before he ascended, and left them staring at his ankles, feeling completely fearful, lonely, isolated, and abandoned.

Now they are behind closed doors once again. Praying. Trying to figure out what to do. When they began to hear the sound of a rushing wind, and flames, like tongues of fire, began to appear on their heads. And they began to speak in all different languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability. And they poured out upon the streets, and people heard them speaking in their own languages.

On this day, the spirit pours out upon all flesh—upon men and women, young and old, landowners and slaves, upon every race and ethnicity. It does not matter what sort of divides the society has set up between races, classes, genders, or age. The Spirit pours out upon all of them. Giving them a new boldness, courage rooted in God's love. The Spirit empowers them.

And hear, at this moment, we have a glimpse of the dream of God. It is the dream that God gave the prophet Joel, it is the dream that came about on Pentecost, and it is the dream that we hold on to this morning. For we have gone through trials, we have gone through heartache, but we know from the promises of Pentecost that we are not alone. And God not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and sound mind. The truth of Pentecost is the truth that we hold in our guts this morning—we can participate in this dream of God.

Friends, In Jesus Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. We are all one. And as we go out in our work and in our world, the spirit will give us the wisdom to live with the Spirit's abundance.

Through God our Creator, God our Nurturer, and God our Liberator. Amen.