

Crossing the Threshold

Peter raised his voice and addressed them: *"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh"* (Acts 2:17a)



You may be familiar with C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. Although the great Christian author maintained that it was merely a children's story, he also did not deny its many allusions to the Christian story.

Peter Pevensie and his siblings Susan, Edmund and Lucy live in World War II England, and have taken refuge from the Blitz in the country home of the Professor, where they encounter a mysterious wardrobe. When they cross its threshold, they enter the frozen land of Narnia. There, they learn much about their courage and gifts as they join the lion King Aslan in defeating the witch and transforming Narnia from an oppressive land of perpetual winter into a beautiful sunlit world of peace and joy.

During this undertaking, in the chapter titled "Peter's First Battle," we read: "Peter did not feel very brave; indeed, he felt he was going to be sick. But that made no difference to what he had to do."

Today, we recall how on the first Pentecost, Peter and the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, bravely crossed the threshold of the house where they were taking refuge and went forth to boldly proclaim the Gospel.

The Acts of the Apostles might just as well be titled The Acts of the Holy Spirit. It tells the story of the Holy Spirit at work in the disciples and their world forming a church around the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The story begins with a theophany of sorts. *"And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting...and tongues rested on each of them."* (Acts 2:2)

The Spirit imparted on all present the ability to speak in languages. This is different from the "tongues" mentioned in The First Letter to the Corinthians. That particular phenomenon required interpretation. This was recognizable human language.

When you can understand the language of someone from another place and culture, you have the ability to communicate across differences. To unmake the confusion of languages and cultures and perspectives arising from the Babel of our pride. On Pentecost, it was the first gift given by the Holy Spirit toward the reconciliation of all peoples under Christ.

Peter proclaims in the words of the prophet Joel that the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. On the Day of Pentecost, the prophetic word, once thought ended in Israel, comes alive with the Spirit. *"Every race and nation,"* (Collect) across all differences of gender, age and social status, will be filled with visions of a world and its peoples born anew in Christ. *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Acts 2:21)

When we knit together the stories from Acts, including those we have been reading during Eastertide, we see the Spirit radiating outward, dissolving all boundaries of separation and difference. After coming to the disciples, the Spirit is shed upon the Jewish Diaspora, Jews

from other nations and languages, gathered in Jerusalem for the harvest celebration. The Spirit then falls upon the Samaritans, the Jewish fringe. The Ethiopian eunuch, ostracized by religion and relegated to the edge of relationship. Saul, transformed from zealous Jewish prosecutor to Paul, zealous apostle. The Spirit prepares to set sail from the Judean port of Joppa, with the witness of poor widows and the raising of Tabitha. The Spirit falls upon Cornelius and the Gentiles, and finally, comes to the heart of Rome itself.

The Spirit of God calls all into new relationship. Forms us into a new family. The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams describes this as *"the vision of a human belonging more comprehensive than any existing form of human connectedness, race, kindred or imperium."*

In those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:18b) We are but a blink of time's eye from Rome. *"Those days"* are now. The Holy Spirit, radiating ever outward across space and time, has been poured out on us in baptism. We too, are called to prophesy to this vision of a new human belonging.

Visions and dreams are good. But prophesy is more than vision. Prophesy is also love in action. To put it simply, the reconciliation of the human family can't happen without us. By our Baptismal Covenant, we dedicate ourselves to making this vision a reality.

Though the Spirit rest upon us, the mission of reconciling all things under Christ is still hard work. It can feel like an uphill battle. No wonder St. Paul uses the imagery of childbirth. We are both giving birth and being midwives to the new creation. Well, Paul's a guy and so am I, so in my humblest mansplaining voice here's my sense of what Paul is saying it's all about. Lots of groaning for sure, accompanied by hope, pain, sweat, blood and even danger. Then more of all that, plus a dose of disorienting confusion. And in the end, miraculous, inconceivable joy.

Trying to live out my Christian call, I can identify with poor Peter Pevensie. A youth who's glimpsed the glory of Aslan but on the eve of battle is not feeling very brave at all. Perhaps this is why Jesus so strongly emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, our help and comfort who walks alongside us.

The Advocate is the one who will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. We stand as witnesses to a God who gave his only Son to save us from our sinfulness. Who by his death and resurrection has fulfilled all righteousness. Who has rendered final judgement against evil.

The Advocate will prove that Christ's victory is once and for all. St. Paul reminds us that *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* (Romans 8:37) Because we have been so loved, we radiate the love of Christ. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are comforters for an aching world.

During bible study at last Sunday's vestry meeting, it was suggested that in the hospitality we extend to our community, St. Mark's be mindful of our witness as followers of Jesus. As we cross our sanctuary threshold to enjoy coffee hour along Main Street today, let us remember who we are and who walks alongside us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may our tongues praise your name Lord Christ!