

It was nine o'clock in the morning. We were all together, gathered for a funeral. The doorbell rang and more family members, whom I had heard about but didn't remember meeting, walked into my grandmother's house. My family were the ones from far away; my father was in the military so we moved around. Any time a life event like this happened in my family, the whole family gathered. We came from far and near.

Really, it was a chaotic time emotionally. The person whom I did know should have been there, my grandfather(\*). But, he was not. He had died. Yet, he was not gone; everyone I met that morning knew the man I knew - a father, brother, uncle, an identical twin, a man who worked hard, owned the hardware store with his brothers, who had a dry sense of humor, who was an elder in the Presbyterian Church, who loved God, who had been sick but wasn't going to have to worry about that anymore. Everyone that arrived shared a story about how he built things, how he and his brother shared classes, supported one another. From time to time people would tear up and then someone else would share another story, laughing and hugging and loving on one another.

As the crowd grew, the warmth spread, and it was not just because it was Lubbock, Texas, hot even in December. It was not because we were filled with wine; nobody was drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning. The warmth spreading came from a special spirit that was among us. What was this spirit that moved through us connecting us, uniting us, making us a family? Love? What did this mean? One truth I learned at the age of 12 was that this was what death looked like. This is what "the end" (whatever that was) was supposed to be like - a family reunion, a time of warmth and joy, "a great and glorious day when everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." What was a sad day had become a joyful day. What was an end had become a beginning. Perhaps on this Memorial Day weekend you have your own 9 O'Clock hour memory of someone you loved for whom death is not the last word.

The birthday of the church was like that. The end became the beginning.

It was 9 o'clock in the morning. At first, the disciples were all together inside. Outside on the streets of Jerusalem, people were gathering from all over the region talking about God's good deeds of power.

"Did you hear about that guy, Jesus from Nazareth? Yea. The one that healed the blind man...yea, the one that cured the lady who was bleeding...yea, the one who raised the girl from the dead, ...yea, the one who turned water into wine, ...yea the one who was crucified..."

Seven weeks had gone by since Passover, fifty days. Jesus had been gone less than 2 months. The disciples weren't finished mourning but the city had moved on. The Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, was being celebrated in the streets. Fires were burning in the temple. Lamb was being slaughtered for roasting. Wheat was being ground and bread baked. Grapes were being pressed and wine tasted. There were religious services. People were celebrating the day they received the Law of Moses. People were experiencing life. Everyone outside the inner circle of the grieving Jesus-followers was having a party in the streets. And, they were connecting and sharing stories and living.

And, then, the Holy Spirit arrived in that inside room where the disciples were holed up. It was like a fire. It was like a wind. It was a movement so powerful it poured out into the streets. In fact, it moved

the disciples out onto the streets. They wanted to share. They had to tell what had happened to them. They had to say what they knew. People who were from groups that did not hang out together, people who spoke other languages, people who had never met were talking together about the good deeds that God had done.

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Is it so hard to believe that a crowd of people who spoke different languages could understand each other? When we went to Cuba, we could not speak Spanish, not really, a few numbers, a few words. But, we could communicate with people who couldn't speak English. We got our point across. And, even if we didn't really didn't get the words, we got the emotional meaning behind the words. Care spreads. Someday, go upstairs to the cafe to the ELL/ESL program. You will see the same thing happen.

I suppose communicating love, which is what I believe the Holy Spirit feels like, is kind of like how electricity spreads. Someone told me about a science experiment on electricity in which children hold hands in a circle. Two people in the circle will hold an energy stick between them instead of holding hand to hand like everyone else. When the circle is complete and everyone is holding hands, the energy stick lights up and makes cool sounds. When the circle is broken by two people in the circle dropping hands, the energy stick will stop lighting up. Electricity spreads through the people when there is an unbroken connection. Something like this happened on this Pentecost morning. The Holy Spirit, symbolized appropriately by fire, moved through them all because of love; connecting them, uniting them.

When people wondered about their drunk like behavior, Peter, our disciple who is grounded, the Rock, turned to scripture to share a word that made meaning out of all of this craziness. He was like the electric stick; he shined the light. He said, “It is nine o'clock in the morning. The people are not drunk. You are connecting with a love greater than anyone has ever known, the power of God. This love - a love that is as hot as fire and a love that breathes life in all of creation is love born from God. This is the Holy Spirit, the Great Comforter, the Advocate, the one to come that Jesus talked about. This is Jesus' Spirit. This is what he talked about.”

People from all over the region, felt the warmth and joy of the Holy Spirit that filled this group of disciples and made it so that everyone, even those who spoke a different language, could understand each other. Nationalities faded away, age faded away, gender faded away, people together were looking forward, regaining a sense of purpose and vision.

Peter found truth in the prophet Joel who talked about the end times for those people who served God. Peter was able to say with certainty that death does not have the last word. The end is not over for those who call upon the name of the Lord.

How do you make sense of a nine o'clock morning that is not going how you planned? How do you make sense of when there is sure and certain death but you find life blowing through instead? How

do you make sense of a love that forms in and among you when you reach out in love toward others? You don't want to let it go! You want to pass it on!

It is almost ten o'clock in the morning. We are all together. The Spirit is still burning in the hearts of the people. Yes, our numbers are smaller, but they were small when we started. Yes, we are older, but we still have wisdom and experience and God's love to share with the world. Yes, we are different than when we started, but we are still the Church of Jesus Christ. Until the Spirit is finished with us, our hearts will burn.

And, so we give to others and we tell the story to the young and to others who need to hear about life and where it really comes from and who gives it meaning.

We are the Church, writes Ann Weems, "We don't pretend to understand the mystery of what goes on in God's Church, we just know we feel a pervading spirit of love that reaches into the niches of all of us and pulls us out into the open, free and alive and belonging. We believe this spirit of love exists because God's spirit lives within this Church, this unity of persons trying to be the Good News. We see this Church as a circle of persons holding hands...and dancing...supporting each other, accepting each other, loving each other...Each person in this dancing circle is facing outward...reaching into God's world, listening for the whimpering, watching for the hurting, willing to offer a cup of cold water in His name. Sometimes they need the water; sometimes you need the water; sometimes I need the water. Being a part of the Church means knowing the the cup is always filled in His name." (Searching for Shalom, p. 54)

Happy Birthday, Church. Your candles are lit. There are more to light outside our walls. Let's keep the fire burning.