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# Let the Spirit Take You There

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A Sermon By  
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Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon is available at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pentecost.mp3>.

## Let the Spirit Take You There

Acts 2:1-21

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The Day of Pentecost  
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*When the day of Pentecost had come...*

Acts 2:1

For the disciples of Jesus, it had been a surreal two months. After witnessing Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, they suffered in agony over the next three days, forced to live with their own guilt and betrayal until, on that third day, unbelievably and miraculously, Jesus rose from the dead.

Over the next several weeks, Jesus appeared to the disciples: as they hid in fear, in the locked upper room; while they walked along, on the road to Emmaus; as they came ashore, after fishing on the Sea of Tiberius. According to the Bible, he gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive again. He broke bread with them, interpreted scripture and spoke over and over about the coming of God's kingdom.

Then, just when life seemed to be settling down and things appeared to be returning to normal, Jesus left once again, this time for the last time. Before he left, though, he gave the disciples very specific instructions. They were to return to Jerusalem and wait there. "You will receive power," he told them, "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to all the ends of the earth."<sup>1</sup>

With those words echoing in their ears, the disciples returned to Jerusalem as they were told, and reaching the house where they were staying, they closed the door behind them and began to wait. They waited, and they waited. For ten long, interminable days, they waited, waited for something to happen, waited for some sort of sign, waited for Jesus' promise to come to fruition.

If you ever had to wait like that, perhaps for some news to come your way – someone to call you back about a job opportunity or a doctor getting back to you with your test results – you know what it is like: it is the absolute worst possible feeling in the world. You feel so helpless because there is nothing you can do but wait. Time passes so incredibly slowly, and your mind goes in a million different directions. You try to remain hopeful, telling yourself everything will work out, but more often than not you find yourself worrying, your thoughts going to places you really don't want them to go.

As the disciples waited, with Jesus' words lingering in the ears, the enormity of their responsibility must have weighed upon them. Everything that started with Jesus was now up to

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:8

them. They were to be Jesus' witnesses. It was their job to go out into the world, to all ends of the world, to proclaim the Good News and preach about the kingdom of God. They were the foundation of the church. It was all up to them. Without them, there was nothing. And, they must have wondered if they were up to the task.

Surely, thoughts of self-doubt crossed their minds. The disciples were human, after all, and human beings all suffer from moments of insecurity and uncertainty. The world is a tough place, always asking us to prove ourselves and making it clear when we don't measure up, because of the way we look; because of what we do; because of the size of our bank account. We do not have to travel far before we hear voices telling us, "You're not good enough. You're in over your head. You can't do it." And, it is pretty easy to internalize those negative images and messages until we end up questioning ourselves and second guessing ourselves and doubting ourselves.

I remember during the second year in seminary, my classmates and I all took *Introduction to Preaching*, and one of the requirements for the course was giving sermons in class, actually preaching to your classmates who would immediately critique your sermon as soon as you were finished. For one round of sermons, our class met in a nearby church so we could all get a feel for standing in a pulpit, and when it was my turn to go, I stepped up confidently, placed my text on the lectern and began. But then, something happened. As I was speaking, all I could think was: "This sermon is horrible. This is the worst sermon ever. There is no point to it. You're not making any sense. And, now you're talking too fast." I wanted to pick up my text and go back to my seat. And, for a moment, I just froze.

Even the most successful, most accomplished people in the world have experiences like that. After being cut from his high school basketball team, Michael Jordan went home, locked himself in his bedroom, and cried. Oprah Winfrey was demoted from her job as a news anchor because she wasn't fit for television. Walt Disney was fired from a newspaper for lacking imagination and having no original ideas. And, Abraham Lincoln completely failed in business, was defeated in eight elections and suffered a nervous breakdown. They all heard the voices of doubt whispering in their ear.

Those voices are surprisingly powerful and persistent and can greatly influence our lives by immobilizing us, talking us out of trying new activities, setting higher goals, reaching for the stars. They scare away our motivation and cause us always to play it safe, never taking a chance at greater success. The questioning and second guessing and doubting ourselves freezes us in our place and keeps us holed up inside the house as life just passes on by. I think Shakespeare said it best when he wrote:

Our doubts are traitors,  
and make us lose the good we oft might win,  
by fearing to attempt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*

The disciples knew those doubts. Those doubts were running all through their minds, one questions after another: Can we do this? Are we up for this? Can we be witnesses to all the ends of the earth?

And, that is when the Holy Spirit showed up, making an entrance like you cannot believe, blasting through like the rush of a violent wind and filling the entire house where the disciples were sitting. The Spirit swept away all the disciples questions and all their second guessing and all their doubts and carried them out onto the street, turning them loose on the entire world. In that one instant, the disciples were transformed, and they transformed the world, doing exactly what Jesus told them to do: proclaiming the Good News; preaching about the kingdom of God; and being his witnesses to the all the ends of the earth.

If the Holy Spirit can do that for them, imagine what she can do for you.

Today, we join the disciples in claiming the promise of Jesus. In the words of the prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.  
[And] everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Today, is a day for new opportunities and setting higher goals and reaching for the stars.

No more doubts.  
No more being frozen where you stand.  
No more holing up inside.

So, whatever you aspire to, whatever you hope for, go ahead and go for it, and let the Holy Spirit take you there.

Amen.