

4 Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! 5 Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. 6 Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. - **Common English Bible**

Five years ago I began my ministry with you this very week, on June 1st to be precise. And led worship for the first time as your solo pastor on Pentecost Sunday, five years ago YESTERDAY. On my first anniversary, when last we had this passage from Philippians as our focus, I shared a story that I'd like to share again.

When a husband and wife were on their first missionary journey to Portugal, they met a woman in the village where they were serving who was very eager to bless them with a meal. She insisted they come to her home and allow her to thank them with a dinner.

It was very humbling to enter the home she had put together from scraps from the local dump-- pieces of tin, boxes, broken up baskets. It wasn't anything we would call a home or even a shelter. In the back was an open area where they stood around a fire she began to build.

She had a few pieces of fish and the missionaries struggled to eat what little she had for herself and children. As she gathered wood and built the fire, she told them that ever since she was a little girl, every day her mother would ask her to go gather wood so they could prepare the fire, not knowing where food would come from but preparing the fire in anticipation that God would provide. She had been building the same fire every day, all these years, ready to receive what God would provide for them that day. They have yet go without. They may have not had much but some how there was always something for the fire.

She asked her guests to eat the last of her fish because tomorrow she would build another fire and more would come.

I heard this story from Sandee, the yoga teacher who used to teach in our chapel. She told us this story in a holy yoga class and invited us to think of what action we need to take even as we wait for the action of God that we need, what is the fire we need to build every day in faith and hope? I then used this image of gathering wood for a fire as

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a focus for meditation at the start of my days and the first time I did this something interesting happened. I imagined walking into the woods to pick up kindling and larger sticks and then I started seeing members of St. Andrew's one by one, picking up and laying down firewood with me. I then chose to add this to my visualization, I pictured as many members of St. A's as I can, one by one, picking up and laying down kindling, branches, logs... from the youngest to the oldest and everyone in between.

Four years ago we were awaiting clarity of vision and that's why I found this story to be so powerful, but now even though we have been blessed with vision, we are in the midst of an extended liminal season, a time of uncertainty and waiting. Liminality is in-between space and time— threshold time. We will eventually move fully into a settled new way of being, but what that will be is not entirely clear. This is not a particularly comfortable place to be. Many, when confronted with extended liminality just want to go BACK to what is known and familiar and comfortable. Have you noticed all the nostalgia in pop culture of late? A Top Gun sequel 36 years later?? But everything has changed, and is changing... there's no way to go back. We can only go forward. And we will do so under the guidance of God's Spirit.

The first Pentecost was a rather liminal day for Jesus' first disciples. It was a Jewish festival day, but with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus all has changed, and yet what that means and what that will mean is not yet clear. On that Pentecost that Acts 2 recalls, the followers of Jesus are gathered in one place... 10 days before, the risen Christ spoke his final words to them, assuring them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit that will allow them to be witnesses to him in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, and then he disappeared... ascended into heaven, as Luke recalls it in the Book of Acts. And at first they stood there agog, until two men in white robes encouraged them to get on with it, to stop staring at heaven. So they went back to Jerusalem, and elected a replacement disciple for Judas, and waited... liminal space...

I imagine there was some anxiety in this fellowship. What now? What next? How will we know that we have the power Jesus said he's going to send us? Do I have what it takes to be a witness? Will they do to us what they did to Jesus?

Several decades later in the established church in Philippi there was anxiety too... disagreements and divisions... they were waiting for the return of Christ and folks may

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well have been getting antsy in the meantime. Paul would not have suggested that they be glad and non-anxious if they were already glad and non-anxious.

And even now, a few millennia later, there's anxiety in Christ's church, even right here at the corner of Sunset and Dosch. Things aren't as they used to be and what they will be is not entirely clear just yet. The world as we know it still needs a witness to the transformative love of Christ, but how best to do this in the midst of a global pandemic, and an epidemic of gun violence, and overwhelming increase in poverty, this we are still sorting out.

Paul suggests to the Philippians that they not be anxious about anything, but instead turn to God in prayer, give everything to God in prayer. He suggests that if they manage to do this they will get back a peace that guards their hearts and minds, a peace that keeps them safe in Christ Jesus. It struck me this week that the prayers of the community are the fire building of the community. We don't light the fire, God does that by the Spirit, but by prayer spoken, meditated, enacted we prepare ourselves for what God will do in, through, and for us... and we access peace that seems a bit ill suited to the uncertain and even dangerous world in which we live, peace that exceeds understanding— blessed peace.

Enacted prayer? Did she say enacted prayer? What is that? When we are taking action towards the deepest desires of our hearts, doing our footwork towards that which we want God to do for us... this, I think, is enacted prayer.

In just a bit, you will have the opportunity to practice generosity on behalf of all the ministries of this congregation and particularly for ministry with at-risk youth, and you will come to Christ's table, together, and you will vote to elect leaders for our congregation. Perhaps this afternoon several of you will gather on zoom to watch a film about finding ways to talk across political divides. Maybe some of you are gathering signatures for Lift Every Voice Oregon or finding other ways to advocate for common sense gun reform. Several of you made donations yesterday to benefit vulnerable neighbors in need. All of this and so much more is enacted prayer.

On that Pentecost that birthed the church, they had enacted prayer by securing the leadership they needed and gathering together and waiting on God. And God showed up spectacularly. This is what God does. God does amazing things like making it possible

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for people who ordinarily can't understand each other to understand each other, resulting in the massive growth of a transformational movement. And so it will be for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church if we keep on praying, keep on marching, keep on dreaming, and keep on building that fire.