

## “Pouring out the Spirit on All”

1. I like to keep up on current events.
  - a. I listen to the headlines on the radio, I try to keep up on national news and some local news.
  - b. I listen to some news podcasts, and every so often I watch a French TV newscast to keep up with the language and get a European perspective on the news.
  - c. Events, of course, happen so fast that it’s not easy to keep up, nor is it quite possible to keep everything in perspective.
  - d. In fact, it has been said that journalism is the first draft of history.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil\\_Graham#:~:text=%22First%20rough%20draft%20of%20history%22,-Quotation%20on%20wall&text=lt%20had%20been%20used%20repeatedly,decade%20of%20the%2020th%20century.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Graham#:~:text=%22First%20rough%20draft%20of%20history%22,-Quotation%20on%20wall&text=lt%20had%20been%20used%20repeatedly,decade%20of%20the%2020th%20century.)
  - e. In a way, journalism is an effort in real time to make sense of what is happening around us, helping the community to reflect on what’s around us, and to share it broadly.
  - f. Because, after all, sometimes events don’t fully make sense and collectively we seek to understand them better.
  - g. Canadian Poet and Novelist Margaret Atwood wrote (not necessarily about a news story, but about any story of our lives): “When you are in the middle of a story it isn’t a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It’s only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else.” <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/day-of-pentecost-2/commentary-on-acts-21-21-17>
2. In our reading about the story of Pentecost, which may be familiar to many of us, a very relevant question is asked by the bystanders who witnessed the events in our passage (and we ourselves all these years later still ask): WHAT does this all mean?
  - a. The events of that morning had been confusing, utterly unexpected.
  - b. All the faithful, those inside the house and those standing outside, would have been preparing for a religious festival which was a traditional harvest celebration
  - c. Instead what they got was an unexpected appearance of God’s power in the form of the Spirit descending upon those who had been following Jesus
    - i. It was a whirlwind of divine action, with these followers becoming unsuspecting actors in this unscripted play
    - ii. They must have been stunned at the literal fireworks, and the stirring in their hearts, and at the unrehearsed offers of praise to God in all sorts of languages
  - d. Ah, but to those writing the first draft of the history of the event, it was received with dismissive skepticism: they’re drunk. Pay no attention. Ugh, those backwater Galileans.
  - e. But Peter stood up to place the unexpected event in ancient context, pointing to the words of the prophet Joel and painting a future picture of meaning.

- i. What you now hear, fellow believers, is God fulfilling a promise
  - ii. God, who at creation breathed God's holy breath into the first humans, and made us all in God's image, is once again breathing into our very soul, breathing the Holy Spirit upon all humans. All, irrespective of how any may dare to subcategorize us.
  - iii. What does this mean, you ask? It means God speaks to all and through all
- 3. Ultimately, what does our ministry mean, here at First Pres?
  - a. To some, what happens here may sound like utter nonsense:
    - i. When we talk about inclusion, about justice, about prayer, about service...
    - ii. when we try to learn from the young, innovative voices of our graduates
    - iii. when we speak up to ask about creating affordable housing for chronically homeless people,
    - iv. or about promoting mental health wellbeing for each of us and our neighbors,
    - v. or about advocating for freedom and self-determination for both Palestinians and Israelis...
    - vi. I certainly hope that folk out there aren't dismissing our ideas and passion as just the ramblings of some drunk Presbyterians.
  - b. I would argue that the story God has been writing in us over 200 years and which God continues to write today, tomorrow and in the next 200 years is a story about trusting that God's Spirit is really being poured out upon all people. All people.
    - i. That is to say: to believe and trust that God is still actively speaking in us and through us.
    - ii. that God wants us to listen to one another.
    - iii. that God wants us to amplify any voices being dismissed unfairly.
    - iv. that God wants us to work together in the building up of community
    - v. And that we each play a role. Each one: we have a voice, a passion burning bright.
  - c. We get to write our story, the meaning of our story, in each aspect of our work together as a church, with prayers and service, with reflection and leadership, with questions and conversations.
    - i. The prophet Joel had delivered a shocking message: ALL people would hear and share God's voice.
    - ii. That's not how those in power would have preferred it!
    - iii. Some of us in this building represent PEOPLE IN POWER, or at least we are PEOPLE WITH PRIVILEGE, which makes it all the more important for us to proclaim how God's Spirit speaks through every voice we encounter.
    - iv. That may get confusing, sure.
    - v. But through a filter of grace and trust, and with the benefit of perspective, together we might be able to write our story as one of faithfulness in times of ease and difficulty, of confusion and clarity, of fear and courage.
- 4. Drafts of history require re-writing, so we may revisit and reflect upon our work together, not resting on laurels of past success, but wondering how our actions in ministry continue the model of a God who wants us to listen to and partner with all our neighbors.

## Reflection questions

1. Think about a personal experience which took you years to make sense of as a story of your life.
2. What would a modern-day recasting of the Pentecost events (Acts 2:1-18) sound like? What would the people inside the house say and how would people outside interpret it?
3. What is a practical implication of saying that God speaks to and through all : people of any age, gender, social standing?