
Hearing the Sound as One

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A sermon by Canon Beth Knowlton
Pentecost Sunday
Acts 2:1-21 and John 14:8,17,25-27

As parents of a graduating high school senior, we have spent the year in an accelerating series of concluding events. It started at the beginning of the school year when my husband took a video, much to Rebecca's chagrin, of her "last first day of school." Just a few Sundays ago, she sang in the choir here for the last time. She has been to the prom, and graduation is just a few days away. The event that has hit me the hardest so far though, was the last piano recital.



Rebecca has taken piano lessons since she was in kindergarten. And she has been with her teacher, Miss Jenny, since she was in the third grade. Every spring, we go to the Northminster Presbyterian church and listen to approximately 25 students play their final pieces to end the school year. For ten years, I have shown up to hear her play. But this year was different. Because this year, it seemed as if she didn't play once. I heard her play as each student sat down at the piano.

At this point Rebecca has moved up through the ranks and plays last on the program. So, you might imagine it would be a long wait before our attention was grasped. But as the first little girl, with a starched crinoline dress and patent leather shoes took the stage, I saw Rebecca at her first recital. I saw her with legs dangling, unable to reach the pedals, playing a two line piece of music-- one handed of course. The repertoire of the studio doesn't change radically over the years, so it felt like we were hearing a review of her greatest hits. If I closed my eyes, it was as if the sound was transporting us through time.

We were hearing different expressions of the same musical language, and I found myself hoping that these other children and parents would hang in through the years, so they could have this same experience. And, it really was not just an experience of our child and her accomplishments. It was not just a nostalgic walk down memory lane. It was the experience of connectedness with all the students who had practiced and worked hard throughout the year. It was an experience of unity within diversity.

But it didn't happen the first time I went to one of these recitals. At least for me.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. If you have been here in the past, the reading of the gospel in many languages might not have thrown you. Even if you did not remember when you arrived, you at least may have had a context once the sound started. If you are visiting for one of the baptisms, you might have wondered if we were having trouble with the sound system. Or, wondered what on earth these Episcopalians are up to today.

But what struck me this year, reading the passage from Acts, was that the disciples and those around knew it was Pentecost. Not the Pentecost we think of now. But, they had shown up to celebrate, mind you. They had come to celebrate something familiar. Pentecost was an ancient Jewish feast, celebrating the harvest, and then later the gift of the law given on Mt. Sinai.

So, while the outpouring of the spirit, as promised by Jesus at the ascension is the culmination of the Easter season, I find it interesting that the Holy Spirit shows up somewhere familiar. They came expecting one thing, and heard something radically different.

And I wonder, was their ability to hear based on their faithful preparations during the in-between time?

In addition to the glory and celebration of the Easter season, I always find the period between the Ascension and Pentecost to be slightly unnerving. Frankly the whole season can be a bit unsettling if we really pay attention to the readings. It is a time of joy, but it is also a time of transition. The disciples seem to go back and forth between fear and joy. One minute they are walking on the road with the risen Christ, and then they are locked away in a room fearing for their lives. They haven't taken on new vocations quite yet, but find themselves out fishing to pass the time. They are clinging to the familiar while waiting for the new.

After the ascension, this really accelerates. No more appearance by the Risen Christ, just some vague promises about an Advocate, a teacher who is on the way. And while we know it comes fifty days after the resurrection, they were not given the date on their calendars.

So, they have to decide how to wait, when they don't quite know what is coming or when. And how we wait, does make a difference.

The gospel lesson today from John reminds us that this has been a process. Even before the crucifixion, Jesus is trying to get them ready. And, good old Philip is still pressing for the answers. He has just been assured that Jesus is going ahead to prepare a place, and that it will have many dwelling places. But, I have to love Philip. Despite Jesus' assurances, he wants to know more. If he is going to have to be forced to wait and be patient, he wants a bit more specificity.

"Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves ..."

I hear this call to belief as a call to look and listen. It is not going to be immediately obvious, but much of what Jesus is telling the disciples is that they already have the tools they need. They may not believe it as they enter into this time of upheaval and uncertainty, but they have been prepared. They have a relationship with Jesus and the Father, and it will be enough.

Enough to know how to wait.

Waiting is hard and waiting is messy. But I think the disciples give us a pretty good model. They show up. They keep going to the festivals. They have not thrown the baby out with the bath water. They do not know what will be the same and what will change. But, they decide to keep worshipping and praying with one another.

They also keep working until the new work is obvious. So, fishing if they fished before makes sense. They still have to eat and there is a way to work expectantly, actively, so the in-between time is still fruitful. It can be purposeful and not aimless.

They may still be anxious in the face of the unknown, but they have decided to gather as community, pray and work with one another, and that will make all the difference. It is why we baptize these children into our community today on Pentecost. They will join the story in a new way today. Their parents and godparents are unsure what the months and years will bring. There are many beginnings and endings to come as they grow. But by choosing to have those beginnings and endings take place in a community that has been created by the Holy Spirit will transform the many transitions to come.

So, my hope for each of these families and each one of us is that we show up and pray with one another. We work with one another. And when the sound comes and we hear our lives as part of the greater story, may we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and know ourselves to be One with Christ. One with the Father. And One with each other.

Amen

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