
God is in The Midst of Confusion

A sermon by the Rev. C. Wallace Marsh IV
Pentecost Sunday – Year A

On the day of Pentecost “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” Those gathered around were utterly confused. The Greek word for “bewildered” is used to describe people who are perplexed, astonished, confused, and in dismay.

I love Pentecost because it reminds me God is the midst of confusion.

If you have spent time in a Bible Study, you know that God does some of God’s best work when things are confusing. Think back to some of the great stories of the Bible: The story of Moses, the prophets, Mary and Joseph, or any of Jesus’ disciples. Or better yet, think back to fifty days ago, when there was confusion around an empty tomb. God works in the confusion.

Thus, the title of today’s sermon: “God is in the Midst of Confusion.”

Most of us start from the position that confusion is something we want to avoid. When we experience uncertainty in our jobs or confusion in our personal relationships we want clarity and we want it quickly!

Think back to the last time your world was turned upside down. What did you do? Did you call your friends? Did you talk to your spouse? Did you email a mentor? Did you seek the counsel of a priest or a therapist?

Why do we reach out to others? We do so because we don’t sleep well, we don’t work well; we don’t do anything well when life gets confusing. We want clarity and we want it as quickly as possible!

The feast of Pentecost reminds us that God is present in the confusion.

The question for 21st century Christians is this: Can we learn to embrace the confusion? Can we tolerate the confusion long enough to experience God?

Let me share a story about embracing the confusion. I had a one-month gap between graduating from Yale Divinity School and starting as Associate Rector at St. Paul’s, Albany, GA.

A few weeks before graduation, my childhood friend and his wife called to invite me to join them on their vacation. They were going to walk the last 150 Kilometers of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. I said to my friends, “Are you sure you want me to be a third wheel on your vacation?” They said, “We want you to join us. You are about to graduate from divinity school, a few months away from being ordained a priest; join us on this holy pilgrimage, as we journey to the body of St. James.” So I went.

A few days into the pilgrimage, I had an experience of Pentecost. We got up early that morning to hike one of the more

strenuous sections of the pilgrimage. Like the day of Pentecost, there was a violent wind from heaven that was accompanied by a torrential downpour. We hiked all day in miserable conditions climbing the mountains to the village of O' Ciebrero.

The author of our travel book said there weren't many beds in this village, but the major pilgrim hostel was surrounded by beautiful mountain views and served an amazing dinner. Thank God there was room in the Inn. We had been hiking in the pouring rain for eight hours. We were cold, wet and wanted nothing more than a hot shower, a good meal, and a bottle of that fine Spanish wine.

That evening about 20 pilgrims gathered in the dining area, which had a large fireplace with a long table for a family style dinner. As we found our places around the table, it became clear that no group had a language in common with the other party! Once the twenty of us realized the situation, the options became clear:

Option 1: Avoid the confusion. Everyone would eat a quick and silent dinner. We would make a mad dash to the coveted three computers (to check emails) and get to bed early, because tomorrow was another day on the trail. Option 1: Would we avoid the confusion?

Option 2: Embrace the confusion. The day had been full of loud rushing wind and lots of rain, we had been through it all, what was there to lose? Why not try having a family style dinner where everyone speaks a different language? Option 2: Why not embrace the confusion?

Ultimately, we chose to embrace the confusion and spent hours at that table. It was a crazy dinner. Speaking to the person next to you might involve utilizing the language of the person across from you. It was a long game of charades that I still remember seven years later.

The other day I was reminiscing with my friends about that night. They agreed it was like Pentecost, more so than I remembered. They said the dinner began with confusion and ended in one voice, united in the language of our king. I said, "What in the world do you mean... united in the language of our king?" They said, "Wallace, don't you remember the after dinner entertainment included the kitchen staff bringing out an Elvis karaoke machine! We all sang Elvis' greatest hits for an hour." I guess some things are better forgotten.

What made that dinner so special is that everyone approached the confusion with a sense of openness and possibility.

In just a few minutes we will baptize these children into a confusing world. We will tell them that they "are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever."

Pentecost is about taking baptism seriously. It is about believing in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is about realizing that God is in the midst of confusion, that God might even use it as an opportunity to create or resurrect new life.

Again, the question for us today: Will we embrace the confusion? Will we sit at the table long enough to hear God and experience Pentecost?