

They're together in one place- a house - all the apostles. It's actually a Jewish festival day, the spring barley festival or Shavuot, also known as Pentecost. They've been saying the prayers of blessings and thanksgiving for the giving of the laws to Moses, for the Torah. It's a day of prayer and rest and eating, cheeses, cream cakes, bread. All around in other houses, the same kind of celebrating is going on. All over Jerusalem, people are doing this. And many are here from afar because this is one of those festivals when people gather in Jerusalem - from all over. All the scattered Jews are here, praying, visiting with distant family members, eating together. A quiet happy noise pervades the streets. The markets are closed but visiting back and forth between houses, families, friends... Not exactly what we're doing now but what we've done in other times as Spring moves into Summer... And then... AND THEN

*“suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind,
and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*

*Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,
and a tongue rested on each of them.*

*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in other languages”*

Whoa! Terrifying! Exhilarating! Wondrous!

Imagine. There you are visiting with your family in a closely packed city, perhaps the city where you grew up. It's hot so all the doors and windows are open. Maybe warm breezes are blowing through the room. Food, talking, laughter, families reunited. Siblings and cousins returned from afar where life has taken them. Other countries, other languages. And then a great wind arises. Maybe things are blown over, people grab at tablecloths and precarious vessels. What the heck?! And then you hear something - can we hear the fire of the Holy Spirit? What would it sound like? And then the next thing is the babble of voices raised outside the house, people speaking in many languages at once. It's coming from the house of those apostles next door. It draws everyone outside - what's going on? Someone is speaking in my tongue in a city where few understand me! This is amazing! I no longer feel far from home - isn't it great!

And that's it right? The Holy Spirit banishes the central belief we all usually live with - that there's an 'us' and a 'them'. Even when we don't mean to. We live our lives cemented in the story that those others are different from us. The others who don't care about recycling. Or don't believe in God. Or don't like children. Or dogs. Or live with mental health challenges. People who are judgemental or complain. The ones who are smug or indifferent. People who don't follow rules, for heaven's sake! Oh it's so easy to see them as different from who I am. And not in a good way. I know you know what I'm talking about.

But God did not create us so we could look for where others are not as good as we are. God did not create us so we could create injustice and inequity and hard-heartedness. Did God even begin to imagine our capacity to be cruel to each other? We do not know. But what we do know is that when cruelty reigns in our hearts, in

our cultures, in our world... God's heart breaks. And we don't want that, do we? No, no, no!!!

How do we undo our terrible proclivity towards seeing divides or if we can't see them, to creating them? How do we unlearn our toxic leaning towards separating ourselves from each other? My yoga teacher used to say the first - and hardest! - step towards change is to simply take one step back and say, "That's interesting!" With that one step we convert ourselves into an observer of what we've been doing. Not a judge. Not a reformer. Not a castigator. Simply one who observes and is curious. Huh! Look what I just did. Who knew!

Because when we are curious, we are open to learning. From a place of curiosity we are not tangled up in guilt - which definitely paralyzes thinking, analysis, creative solution-finding, problem-solving... From a stance of curiosity we have a chance to find a different way that speaks to our heart, that engages our spirit, that comes from the God who loves us.

So what if in this coming week, each day you kept your eyes and ears open to one situation, one moment when you tended towards us-ing and them-ing. And when you spot it - stop. Take a big breath. Step back one step - that's all it takes. And then comment to yourself, "that's interesting." And then you might find that another way opens to you. Another way to see that situation or that person. Another way into unity. Another way into remembering we are all one. All beloved. All part of the Creator Spirit. The Holy of Holies. God is in us and we are in God. No separations.

I offer you this poem by William Stafford: More than a poem, it's an invitation, a recipe, a map into wholeness...

You Reading This, Be Ready by William Stafford

Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world
than the breathing respect that you carry
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening
all that you want from this day. The interval you spent
reading or hearing this, keep it for life—

What can anyone give you greater than now,
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

Amen