

May 19, 2018

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15, Romans 8:22-27

Acts 2:1-21

Yikes! What Is That?

Introduction

Let me confess I don't like the title of this sermon. I pick a title weeks in advance of the day of delivery and when the Saturday rolls around three months later that I sometimes cannot find the thread that inspired such a catchy moniker. I know the general theme but why did I pick *that* clunker of a line? I think it had something to do with this: Most of us sedate Presbyterians feel uncomfortable with Pentecost Sunday and wish it would just go away. It's too wild, too bizarre for our taste. Most of us. Then there's a radical fringe of the Presbyterian church, sometimes including the preacher, who want to pump up the excitement of the day. Let loose in a Worship Committee such types buy red Chinese lanterns and plan to launch them into the wild blue yonder, ... or decide to give everyone a kazoo and have them hum Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart, or ... or, how about this, rent one of those confetti canons and set it up in the balcony to shower everyone in the congregation with red crepe paper, just like the Super Bowl!

“Yikes! What is that?”

Pentecost is too strange, too emotional. That's the problem. Any time you hear that word Spirit, you get an image of people standing up with their eyes closed, their hands in the air, swaying back and forth. “Yikes!”

And you read things like “**we who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for the ... redemption of our bodies.**” “Yikes!”

Or, “**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,....**” I say again, “**YIKES!**”

This is just not Presbyterian. And, maybe that is the real problem.

Proper

We are sometimes so conventional, so proper, that we'll accept dull preaching rather than have any excitement let loose in the congregation.

Last Thursday night I heard some good old fashioned revivalist style preaching, right here at 304 Broad Street. It was the kind of preaching which people reacted to. They spoke back to the preacher, Brother Tom. Yes, that's right. Right here in this building. I heard "Yeah, brother!" and "That's right! That's right!" when Tom spoke his word. I'm not making this up. It was right here, in our auditorium. From the first word he said he had response. "Hello, I'm Tom. I'm an alcoholic."

Immediately, 90% of the people there said, "Hello Tom!" "Tell us about it Tom!"

And he did. He told a story that would curl your hair, sixteen years of story in about 20 minutes. Sixteen years of betraying his family, losing all his money, making more money and then losing it again, selling a home and buying an RV to live in. Driving from Madison county to the desert Southwest, to Alabama, every ten or twenty days getting so blind drunk he didn't know where he was. Tom went from owning a family business to working for a guy mowing lawns. Sixteen years. And then he found AA and Jesus, and everything changed.

Tom was the featured speaker for the Annual Maxwell House Alumni dinner, which they have held here since 2010. Now, among the 100 people in the room were husbands, and wives and children of alcoholics, men in suits, and men in shorts and tee-shirts, women with perfect hair and women who had no make-up on their face. There were 20 year olds and 70 year olds. Men in ball caps and men who were bald, African American men, White men and Native American men, men and women who were fat, and men and women who looked too thin. And they listened closely to Tom for 20 minutes without the slightest sign of boredom. Far from it! They were with him every step of the journey. It was a little bit like last October when the angel brought us that pallet of Jello.

If there had been a Presbyterian there, they might have trembled a bit and said "Yikes! What is this?" Or, as it says in the book of Acts, had there been

any Presbyterians there, they might have been “**amazed and perplexed ...**” and said “**What does this mean?**”

Now, I can accept that because at least it is an honest question, a question of bewilderment, not mockery. So if you are feeling a little like those people outside the house who did not know what the Spirit was doing, okay. If you are thinking right now our preacher is off his rocker, I wish he'd get back to the Bible or at least and stop talking about Brother Tom (whoever that is), then okay. What I can't accept, and what makes me scared for you and for the church is what those other people overhearing the conversation God was having with his disciples in the Holy Spirit, said.

Dismissive

It is one thing to be so proper you can't catch the Spirit. It is another thing to dismiss the Spirit of God altogether, to say, “Tom and all his friends were high on something. I know those drunks, they fell off the wagon again.” The Book of Acts reports that when the tongue speaking started “**All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said “They are filled with new wine.”**”

You can mistake the Spirit. You can be puzzled by it. You can find it outside your comfort zone. What you *must not* do. What you ***must not do***. What takes you up to the edge of that zone which Jesus called the only sin that will ***not*** be forgiven (Matthew 12:31, look it up.) is to mock the Spirit of God. Don't go there, or you may be lost forever.

Now, I am going to finish this dangerous story, this story of God getting loose in your church ... if you will continue to let him in. I could not help but think that if Jesus were in town last Thursday it was here he would have liked to have his dinner, with Tom and the rest of the “drunks.”

Maxwell House is the large brick building sitting on the Northeast corner diagonally across from our sanctuary, a residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation center. As many as 18 men live there for upwards of sixteen weeks at a time to learn about their addiction and about themselves. Many of them are rough-hewn, have had trouble in school and trouble with the law. Many of them grew up in busted families. They chose alcohol or cocaine, or

even heroin, to escape their problems and that never works out well. Occasionally, on a Sunday morning, one or two of them stop in here. Some of you have taken the step of inviting these tattooed strangers to sit with you and learn about the church. Seventeen months ago one young man, Jason Murdoch, began attending here and joined an Adult Bible class. After two months of attending he asked to be baptized, and he was on March 19, 2017.

So where is this story going, and where will it end? Like so many adventures in the Bible neither you nor I know where it will lead. It is a story that is easily stopped in its tracks if you do nothing. The men of Maxwell House need Jesus Christ to walk with them. They need to know who he is and what he can do. They need role models and examples of generosity, faithfulness, and forgiveness. They need you to practice those things in their presence. If they come here on a Sunday and find us arguing among ourselves they likely will turn away. If they come here and are ignored they probably won't return. They need hope. Will you look past the bad haircut and five day old beard? Will you make them feel welcome? Will you talk about your faith with them? It will move you past your comfort zone that's for sure. But it will also teach you a new language or at least a new way of talking and practicing your faith.

Conclusion

One more thing about this day of Pentecost it was not, as the entire book of Acts reveals, a story of only one remarkable moment. It was the beginning of the church. If those apostles had stayed inside the house and not gone outside to talk to the crowd the church wouldn't have grown one inch. As it was there were 3,000 baptized that day (Acts 2:41). Your faith has to go beyond the walls of this church. It has to be with you when you go the credit union, or the grocery store, or your doctor's office. You don't know who you will meet and what you might mean to them.

And, if you really want to put your faith to work, if you really want to grow in that faith then I'll give you something really specific. Have lunch with me and Jim Strail at Maxwell House, at 12 noon on May 31st. I'm looking for men who will risk getting to know some drunks. We all think that the opioid crisis is awful, that meth amphetamines are terrible, that drunk driving is horrible. Well, they're trying to do something about it, and we can help. They

know us, we're neighbors. They've been to our house. Let's build on that. We have the skills, the gymnasium, the people they need. Thursday, May 31, 12 noon. I've got two men who have already said yes. I need two more not-so-sedate-Presbyterians. How about it? Will you pray on it? Will you feel the shiver of the Spirit?

I say again, **“YIKES!”**