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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
May 24, 2015

Acts 2:1-21
“That’s Pentecost”

We read this great Pentecost text every year on this day. Each year, there are new insights given the realities of our day. In the closing keynote session at the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists conference last weekend we heard of one such reality, to be shared in two parts: At the beginning and end of this sermon.

The presenters were Amy and Arnold Mindell who have taken their Process Oriented Psychology all over the world. Arnold has published 21 books, translated into 30 languages. He connects psychology with God. The title of one of his books is, *ProcesMind: A User’s Guide to Connecting with the Mind of God*. That’s Pentecost.

Amy and Arnold had just completed a world lecture tour and shared four contexts where they did healing work. The first was Bogota, Colombia, a city with a history of violence. In the 1990s, it was regarded as one of the most violent cities in the world. The question asked by Arnold was, "How does one work for peace when you’re at war?" In London, they met with South Africans struggling with the immigration issue back in their home country where their compatriots are killing immigrants for supposedly taking their jobs. In Moscow, Russians felt isolated and worried that people around the world hated them. In Fukushima, Japan, the concern was, “How do we live in an environment when we know it is contaminated with radiation?”

In the Acts of the Apostles, the foreign visitors to Jerusalem experience the Holy Spirit and ask, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” People in Bogota, London, Moscow and Fukushima heard in their native languages the Holy Spirit’s healing message through Amy and Arnold.

Presbyterian World Mission helps Presbyterians offer a witness to Jesus Christ in today’s world by sending mission personnel to face the challenges of evangelizing and continuing the historic emphases of the church. Today, nearly 200 mission co-workers in approximately 50 countries are engaged in vital ministries of sharing faith and working against poverty and violence.

On Pentecost, we celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. The *Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study* conveys powerful versions. Stories of mission involvement cover the globe. In these weeks, the yearbook features

Africa. I included one of the stories in the insert. I call it “The Mother Teresa of Africa.”

The entry on the Republic of Sudan tells the story of our partner churches in Sudan and South Sudan. They describe the events in the region as one of the great human tragedies of our day. Powerful individuals and political forces tear at the social fabric of a long-suffering people. The infrastructure is frail at best after decades of war. Inhumanity prevails on a scale impossible for us to imagine. Each day threatens unpredictable horrors.

Yet, says the entry, the church of Jesus Christ in its Presbyterian and numerous other forms, is a present and faithful witness, and the amazing courage and resilience of its people evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. That’s Pentecost. Four presbyteries in our denomination have established partnerships with the churches in the Republic of Sudan. They provide prayer and material support. That’s Pentecost.

The entry the following day on Ethiopia tells the story of a mother of five who arrived in Ethiopia from South Sudan. She arrived at a church compound exhausted, dehydrated, and malnourished after a month of walking from the town of Malakal. With compassion, the women of the church helped her to register as a refugee. The women embraced her as a sister and ensured she was safely housed and fed. That’s Pentecost: The Holy Spirit’s nurturing and healing presence from country to country.

The following day, the Mission Yearbook tells the story of the Medical Benevolence Foundation and the Presbyterian Mission Hospital called “Moma Hospital’ in the Congo. As a ministry of the Presbyterian Community of Congo, Moma is a place of peace for the poor, where compassionate care for the sick is coupled with conversations and prayers about the good news of God’s love. The Medical Benevolence Foundation has headquarters in the US. They support hospitals throughout the world. That’s Pentecost.

The church at large gets a bad rap in the USA with some of its negative expressions. One only has to read the mission yearbook and world mission news at pcusa.org to appreciate the wonderful ministry of our church and many partner churches around the world. The Holy Spirit in its Pentecost context is alive and well in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The concluding words to the scriptural reading today are from the Hebrew prophet, Joel. He says, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The prophet Joel tells it like it is. While the world is a lovely and beautiful place it is also a foreboding place of darkness, blood and fire. When are the last days? Every day is a last day as I read history and see the realities of today.

The Director of Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministries of our denomination, Sara Lisherness, speaks of this reality and ends in a positive note in the introduction to the mission yearbook.

For her, Pentecost is about meeting global neighbors like a young girl in Southeast Asia sold into slavery so her parents can feed her siblings. Our neighbor is in prison, caught for selling drugs to feed his habit. Our neighbor is homeless, living in temporary shelter after a devastating tornado. They are among the neighbors who Christ calls us to love. They are those with different lives and languages, which the Holy Spirit calls us to save, in other words, to heal.

Sara continues: “We share Christ’s love with our neighbors when we support our local food pantry, but also when we advocate for a living wage so parents can feed their families. We share Christ’s love (and Holy Spirit salvation) when we provide a safe alternative for young girls who are caught in the snare of sex trafficking, but also when we demand that the ‘hospitality’ industry agree to guidelines that make trafficking more difficult.”

Pentecost’s Holy, Healing Spirit meets the hurts and tragedies in many languages locally and around the world. It meets them practically and mysteriously.

Amy and Arnold Mindell told a story that conveys the mystery and efficacy of the Holy Spirit. They were doing healing work in Northern Ireland the day before a peace accord was signed between the IRA and the Ulster Party. They were in a room with both factions and on stage with two leaders from either side.

The IRA leader pointed to the Ulster member and said I hate and despise you because you came into my house and murdered my entire family. The IRA crowd erupted with venomous applause. Amy and Arnold were flummoxed. They said all their theories went out of the window.

The Ulster member said, “Your men entered a pub where my friends and I were enjoying a beer and you shot all of us. I narrowly escaped.” The Ulster crowd erupted.

Arnold said they didn’t know what to say and called deeply into their intuitive selves, which is to say they relied on the Holy Spirit for intervention.

Arnold noticed that the IRA leader's neck was dark red. He said, "Mr. So-and-So your neck is dark red." The man stopped and said, "Yesterday I visited my doctor and he said my blood pressure was so high and that if I came here today I would die.

The other man said, I visited my doctor last week and he told me that my heart was failing and I would never survive today's meeting.

The IRA member reached out his arm and said, "You are going to die?" The other reached out and said, "You are going to die?" They stood looking at each other in silence and slowly and gradually approached each other. The room went silent. One leader placed his hand on the other's shoulder. The other did the same – silently. After a short while, the meeting adjourned. The next day, they signed the peace accord. That's Pentecost!