

Grace and peace and rush of violent Holy Spirit wind to you,
dear Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church. I am Erin Counihan and
I serve as pastor at Oak Hill Presbyterian Church and it is my
great honor to be here with you today in worship, as we gather
online, virtually offer thanks and praises to God, and celebrate
the ministry you share with your pastor and my dear friend, the
Rev. Melanie Smith.

I must confess that I am so deeply sad that we cannot be
together in person, for Mel to be able to see all your faces and
feel your energy and prayers and laying of hands, as finally,
after 8 years together, we make this ministry relationship legit.

But do not fear, myself and a couple of colleagues on this
installation commission, we have some plans to make sure

Pastor Mel can formally receive your blessings and prayers when you drive by the church this afternoon in celebration, and yes, it may or may not involve some incredibly sacred pool noodles (pool noodles of glory).

Note: preacher holds up special pool noodle for laying of hands with social distancing.

For this service today, Pastor Mel has picked this text, this Pentecost tale, this story of the rushing in of the spirit, this story of the wild and wonderful forming of the church, this story of the fulfilment of the promise that Jesus gave his followers, that they would be baptized by the holy spirit to continue on with his ministry, this story of God showing up, in

yet another incredible and unexpected way, this story of the people's bewilderment and fear in the face of God showing up with such power and force, this story of the emotional, physical, tangible presence of the divine among us, is OF COURSE the story Pastor Mel wanted shared on this day.

Now since you all know and love Mel so well, I imagine you're guessing that maybe she picked this story for its dramatic flare. Perhaps once upon a time she choreographed a dance to this scene? Or maybe she picked it for its elements of outreach, accessibility, and welcome- all the languages spoken and understood, all of the people who joined the community that day. But I kinda think she picked it maybe because of the rushing wind, and Mel's complicated relationship with gravity.

You see, if we highlight a story today, during her installation, about God moving through a structure like a blasting wind, well, then forever more in her ministry here, whenever she trips and falls (as she will do) she can blame it on the rush of the Holy Spirit.

Okay, fine, that's not it.

But, I do think Pastor Mel picked Acts chapter 2 for us to reflect on today for a reason. And I wonder if maybe it is because in the time we are in, much like the time the disciples were in, we are deeply in need of a Pentecost moment.

Hey, God, did you hear me? Because, we kinda wind right now. I want to feel your power on my skin and moving through my lungs. As I wait in this precious special room. Waiting for something to change. I want to hear that kind of noise, that cannot be denied, shocking and loud, bewildering and ragey, full of force, that moves me to speak in ways I've never spoken before, in ways I didn't know I could speak.

Because in our time, there's been some drama in the city. Just as they had then, just like in Jerusalem all those years ago, here in our city today, we have questions how the rules and systems and structures of our day are working for the people. Just as the early Jesus movement did, we have questions about how the policies of our community are or are not providing for our

community, we have questions about who is being welcomed and who is being excluded. Just like they did, we have questions about which forces have authority over which bodies. Just like they did, we have questions about which profits serve which purposes and maybe more importantly which profits serve which people. And just as it did in their time, all this questioning is causing a ruckus. Such a ruckus that the question askers are being put in danger. Such a ruckus that the question askers are being threatened by the authorities for drawing attention to the unjust systems that are hurting the community.

When Jesus challenged the policies of his community, when he asked questions about how the people were being treated, the

authorities of his day tried to stop him by incredibly violent means. But fear and violence did not win. And he rose. Fear and violence could not stop his movement. And he rose. Jesus rose and kept teaching. He rose and went out and found his people, and he told them they weren't done yet. He rose and he told them to wait for the power of the spirit, to inspire them, to strengthen them, to continue the work of witnessing to the kind of question asking, community building ministry he had been teaching them all along. And then he left them to do it.

And they waited. Knowing the danger, they waited. Knowing the drama, they waited. As the city went on, they waited. And when the moment was right, God showed up. With power and

pressure, with presence and flame, with language of inclusion,
with radical welcome, with movement and voice, with
spectacle and flare, God found the people and made it clear to
them- this is the time.

This is the time for you to be who you have been called to be.

This is the time to be who you have been taught to be. This is
the time to be who you have prepared to be. This is the time
for you to be drunk with the spirit's presence, ridiculous with
holy enthusiasm, wild with passion for justice, aflame with love
of community. This is the time to be a little radical, because this
is the time to remember who God is and what God can do.

God can make you speak out. God can blow through all our old
buildings. And all our institutions. And all our weary, broken

hearts. God can turn the world around. God can make us, even us who once denied God, like Peter, can turn us into reliable witnesses. God can move and shake and cause us to tremble with amazement. God can create something new out of us, even us, even in a pandemic, even as wildfires rage, even as our climate cries out, even as we struggle to talk about racism, even as we worry about kids and schools and jobs and masks and zoom meetings and church budgets and livestreams, God can and does move through this world, gusting with new experiences, igniting new ideas, and baptizing us with Spirit in order to become something new together.

All that presence and force and inspiration might frighten us, it certainly frightened them. It should absolutely amaze us, as it

amazed them. And, okay, there's a chance we could stumble, surely it will make Mel trip a little, but really, if we are blessed with such a Pentecost moment, in this time, if we can feel God at work among us, I just hope it moves us. I pray that it moves us. I pray that God would show up and give us another Pentecost moment so that we might really become the witnesses to justice, love, and mercy that God has called us to be.

People of faith, followers of Christ, dear Ladue Chapel worship watchers, will you join me in prayer.

Holy God, on this day, in this community, and throughout your wonderful world, we humbly ask, please, send your love. Send a wild rush of power and truth and hope that finds us where

are and moves us to become the kind of community that asks questions, to ask questions out of love for our neighbors that cause a ruckus with systems that function to promote domination and harm, that people take notice. Send a Fiery Holy Presence that moves our muscles and our tongues to speak of God's deeds of power. To speak of Christ's wonderful welcome, hope-filled healing, and justice-loving passion. We pray that the Holy Spirit might show up, in an unexpected way, in this community, in this time, and blast us into a new reality, where we can do nothing but join in and devote ourselves as witnesses.

In love and trust and hope we pray. Amen.
