



I believe the closest I have ever gotten in my life to experiencing anything like Pentecost was in the middle of my 2nd year of seminary. At the time, there were the usual fall and spring semesters, but in between was this J-Term, these few weeks in January, when students could hone in on a particular interest of ministry, with more interactive and contextualized learning experiences, oftentimes away from the campus. Every once in a while, though, you would hit the spiritual jackpot of sorts, when the institution would offer one of those learning experiences in none other than Israel and Palestine.

And so about 40 of us ventured over from Columbus with a layover at JFK in New York before the flight to Tel Aviv, when, of course, while we were in the air, tensions heightened even more in the Middle East, leading to our itinerary being altered just a bit to minimize potential security risks.

Nevertheless, we still went through our fair share of Jerichos and Dead Seas and Bethsaidas and Nazareths and Bethlehems, before concluding our time in Jerusalem, the place where, as

the story so goes, that the whole Pentecost thing happened. And yet, when we were there about 2,000 or so years later, there was a different “rush of a violent wind,” in a sense; again, as tensions were heightened, and greater alertness took over the streets with more and more soldiers patrolling through, which made it rather sad; this place that was meant to be a starting point of love and joy and new life and hopefully some sense of the peace that surpassed all understanding along with it; but, oddly enough, it was almost as if the eerie atmosphere made it all the more real. Because over and over again, no matter how much Gospel was proclaimed by a carpenter’s son and numerous disciples ignited by a relentless Holy Spirit in that supposedly sacred space; over and over again it seems to be just as overwhelmed with hatred and disdain and lack of trust and corruption and violence. And yet, through it all, in spite of all the fear seemingly infiltrating every life and every structure, there was still this unexplainable hope: perhaps the same Holy Spirit still beautifully dwelling there after it was further unleashed thousands of years before.

I still remember quite vividly towards the end of our time there: that particular Sunday morning we worshiped at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Yes, an actual Lutheran church in Jerusalem, hosting four different congregations of sorts based on their primary language spoken between Arabic and Danish and English and German. But what I remember most was a prayer whose age would rival the history of any physical structure in that city, a prayer that has been spoken by countless many since the carpenter’s son came along. Words that have a way of sticking with children of God towards their very end of their earthly time, because they have seeped into the very depths of their soul, never to leave.

When we got to the Lord’s Prayer, I still remember hearing for the first time in my life, a presiding minister actually inviting people to pray in their native language. I remember initially thinking it would assuredly be a train-wreck, not allowing us primarily English-speaking people to concentrate on our cherished words, not knowing if we were lining up our respective phrases just right, as if God couldn’t somehow manage to understand all our words if we didn’t, or if we were about to end at different times like we Lutherans always do with our Roman Catholic siblings in Christ at weddings and funerals, leaving an unpleasant awkwardness with what is supposed to be this most beloved prayer.

However, it turned out to be rather sacredly surreal. Now, I don’t know what Pentecost felt like for the disciples, including the strange, but holy, empowerment to share the Gospel with complete

strangers from different places and cultures that might have been scary and fascinating all at once. I don't know exactly what that was like. But I like to think there was a holy bit of it going on that day in Jerusalem thousands of years later. Almost as if amidst the backdrop of tension and fear, people from all over the world were still clinging to the same Lord who initiated the prayer long before, because, well, they didn't know where else to turn. That no matter the mistakes made by humanity, including in the city that was meant to be an epicenter of hope, the precious children of God in that sanctuary were not going to lose hope not just for that region of the world, but for their own homeland, too, and that all those places would be considered a home for God to beautifully dwell. It was almost as if all the languages spoken that morning as a reminder of the Gospel reaching to the ancient and modern-day Parthians, Medes, and Elamites and everywhere else in between: that that same relentless Gospel had no intention of stopping from sharing the unfathomable joy that took the carpenter's son from Bethlehem to Nazareth to Jerusalem to a Calvary hillside and out of a tomb, rushing into the rest of the world ever since.

It was almost as if that same enthralling Holy Spirit that rushed through the disciples and foreigners from long ago, was whole-heartedly rushing through us, too, and not just to give us soothing comfort, but to re-ignite our own discipleship in proclaiming love and compassion and new life in any way we can. I don't know what it was like long ago when the church was called into fervent and beautiful action on that day of Pentecost, but I like to think we caught a glimpse of it several years ago, and I like to think whenever the church gathers today, there still is this rush of hope and joy and blessed reassurance, no matter the not so pleasant backdrop of the worldly proceedings: that not only is Christ still risen indeed, but the Holy Spirit is still igniting an empowerment within us today to be the living disciples for the sake of the world that God, for some reason, still so loves. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!