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Giving Birth  
May 11, 2008  
Pentecost  
Acts 2:1-21

Children love to hear the story  
of when they were born.

On the day you were born, we told our son  
it was a warm July day  
and you arrived a little earlier  
than we had planned.

We hadn't even gotten around to purchasing  
the video camera.

After pouring over the pregnancy bible  
What to Expect When You Are Expecting  
we went to the hospital with my little pre-packed bag  
and thought we had some idea  
of how this was going to go.

But our baby had not read the What to Expect book  
and nothing went like the book had promised.  
We found out right away who was in control  
and it was not me  
or my husband  
or the doctor.

Babies, even when joyfully expected  
and planned for,  
come along and turn lives upside down.

There were times I wondered  
if I would ever eat a hot meal again,  
and honestly there were days  
I think I would have sold my soul  
for a night of uninterrupted sleep.

The disciples had gone to Jerusalem  
as Jesus had instructed them.

They were anticipating the arrival of the Holy Spirit--  
after all Jesus had said  
he would send the Advocate to be with them,  
after he was gone.

So the disciples went to Jerusalem,  
worshipped,  
and waited.

The disciples were probably expecting  
more of the gentle dove type of Spirit  
that alighted on Jesus at his baptism.

That sweet sweet spirit,  
the brush of angel's wings,  
sweet expressions on everyone's faces.  
You know **that** Holy Spirit.

Like a new parent bringing home their first child  
planning for gentle hours singing lullabies  
reading fairy tales,  
and rocking the baby to sleep,  
only to instead find themselves  
run ragged by the incessant  
and unrelenting demands  
of this little tiny person.

What the disciples got was not a sweet heavenly dove  
but a crash course in power.

That Holy Spirit showed up alright,  
but it was no dove.

First there was wind,  
then there was fire,  
and the whole thing just got totally out of control.

Then the Holy Spirit got inside of them  
and they began to speak in tongues,  
so that all those gathered  
understood in their own language.

The miraculousness of this sudden clarity  
is striking as we often seem to have a hard time  
understanding one another now  
even when we all speak the same language.

Different generations,  
different regions  
have different catch phrases  
and slang.

For example I recently discovered  
that "Home skillet"  
has nothing to do with hash browns  
but it contemporary terms means  
a friend...

To complicate things further,  
the popularity of texting  
has added abbreviations to our language...  
LOL-laugh out loud  
BFF-best friends forever,  
IDK-I don't know.

Terms specific to the Wallick household include the phrase  
I need to "visit the dinosaur"  
which means going to the restroom  
started at Max and Erma's at Easton  
because there is a model of a dinosaur head  
above the entrance to the restrooms.

Another which was coined by my daughter several years ago  
in anger at her father-  
Mr. Bloopy pants.  
Still a house favorite.

So although I often feel baffled especially  
in talking to my children  
the disciples were at least able to translate  
the strange utterances made manifest  
by the Holy Spirit.

They were in the grips of something  
that was as amazing  
as it was inexplicable  
at least in any kind of rational terms.

Some folks just couldn't handle that.  
So they tried to come up with something  
to explain this strange occurrence.

A crowd gathered in the street outside.  
and they mocked what they heard  
going on inside..

*They're drunk*, they joked.  
But Peter said, "It's only 9:00 in the morning  
we would not be hitting the wineskin  
this early in the day."

Then he went on to preach an eloquent sermon  
based on the second chapter of Joel.  
*And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters  
shall prophesy  
and your young men shall see visions  
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

His preaching continues over the next several verses  
summarizing the story of Jesus--  
in a thumbnail sketch of a sermon  
with no illustrations,  
no jokes.

And in verse 37 we are told that the crowd  
*was cut to the heart.*  
The crowd was so moved  
that 3000 people joined the church.

That's a lot of people!

If 3000 people walked in this morning  
and after hearing such an inspiring sermon  
and beautiful music  
decided to join up  
we would have a problem.

Where would we put all of them?  
Our little sign back there,  
says this room only can hold up to 300 people.

We wouldn't have enough chairs or hymnals...  
and where would they park?

People would be spilling coffee  
and children would be running amuck.

It would be loud and messy—  
and glorious!

Luke says that's the sort of unmanageable miracle  
that began the church.

And the labor pains are only beginning.

As the joke goes,  
Jesus promised a kingdom,  
but what we got was the church!!

The people gathered,  
closed its doors  
and had a service.

And then people started coming  
and then the problems really started.

While Peter and company  
planned a nice quiet little service  
suddenly the Holy Spirit shows up  
and 3000 people wanted to join.

A not so gentle reminder that  
God's grace is forever amazing  
always a gift.  
and often a problem.

Because just when we get all settled in,  
and settled down,  
suddenly the church gets opened up,  
opened out,  
and transformed.

At a previous appointment the District Superintendent  
had held her yearly meeting  
with my Staff Parish Relations Committee.  
The next morning she called me  
to report on the meeting.

She said, "I am afraid they believe  
that is totally up to the pastor  
to recruit new members.  
Then she added...  
"But don't worry about it  
because they told me they don't want any."

It is not all that uncommon.  
We know we are *supposed* to  
want to grow our membership.  
We know that if we don't  
there will not be enough volunteers  
or money to keep going  
and the church will die.

But we really don't want new people  
getting involved with their new ideas,  
taking on leadership roles---  
because they will do things differently.

The distrust shows up in subtle ways  
questioning the validity of the appointment  
of a committee chair  
who hasn't been around very long,  
and isn't familiar with our history  
and our ways of doing things.

Complaining about the distractions during worship.

That's what happens when new folks show up---  
we need to make shifts  
in how we are structured  
in how we worship,  
how we serve,  
and even how we fellowship.

It will be a mess!!

That's one thing you can count on—  
spirit filled ministry is a messy business.

So its understandable  
that when we begin to feel the first sparks  
of the Spirit  
starting to catch the people of God on fire,  
our first reaction is to grab the fire extinguisher.

After all the Spirit may cause us  
to get more involved then we really have time for,  
and make changes  
to our comfortable life together.

Pentecost is our reminder  
that God's Spirit isn't always  
predictable or comforting.

It's a reminder that Jesus did not die for a building  
or a committee structure  
and he did not rise from the dead  
to ensure the existence of a not-for profit.

It is also what enables us to speak the good news  
and what makes it **impossible** to stay where we are.

The Spirit is that which controls the mission of the church.  
Which prods and drags the church  
kicking and screaming  
into new areas of ministry.

The Spirit is that which helps us to  
find our tongues  
and make us witnesses.

God always has something else for us-  
some surprising gift waiting  
if only we open ourselves  
to the power of the Holy Spirit.

*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy  
and your young men shall see visions  
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

May it be so!

Lord, you have assembled us, by the power of your Holy Spirit. You have spoken to us your words of life, may they take root in our lives. Amen.

Resources:

Preaching the Lesson. Anna Carter Florence. Lectionary Homiletics. May 2008.