

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, welcome to the greatest show on earth!"

For more than 146 years those words have greeted hundreds of thousands of fans and spectators at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. However, over the years, concerns about animal welfare has become increasingly more important and popular interest in the circus has waned as our electronic gadgets have taken precedence as our primary form of entrainment. So on May 21, the ringmaster uttered those words one final time. I for one will not miss the circus, but there is still something about the ringmaster's majestic greeting that will always be a part of our lexicon. To take in those words is to believe that something wonderful is about to happen. It's letting go of cynicism and doubt and giving way to wonder and possibility and purpose. Kind of like today.

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages, welcome to the greatest show on earth: Pentecost!"

For some reason, it doesn't quite have the same ring to it does it? (*Maybe I need a top hat and tuxedo.*)

But this really *is* the greatest show on earth...I'm just not entirely sure we believe it, or want to believe it, or have the courage or strength to believe and live into it. Almost 2,000 years have passed since that morning when God poured out Her power onto her people and said, "Here are your marching orders. Go love and rescue this world." Like P.T. Barnum's traveling show, we're weary, cynical, tired, and doubtful. The lights are on, but we've gone and left the building. Our planet is in a precarious state of existence, and although we have the responsibility and power to steward it to wholeness, we've let politics get in the way. We're facing spews of hatred and ignorance day after day, and some of us are just tired. We're not sure if the kids really will be alright, as the movies claim. We're not sure if we're living lives of meaning or if our time has come and gone. When it comes to Pentecost we want to believe, but it's hard to. Like the father Jairus pleading for Jesus' healing powers to transform his daughter's broken body, our hearts also cry: "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!" How then does today recall the beginning of the greatest show on earth?

This story that we so often take for granted is not simply a story of people trying to be holy and do good. It's not the story of coming to church and wowing others. This story we have been written into is the story of a God whose creativity is so unmatched that there are species which we have yet to discover. It is the story of a Creator who can set the world in motion with one breath and who catches every tear we cry. It's the story of a people forsaking their purpose to be God's beloved and still being pursued and loved fiercely anyway. It is the story of a peasant woman chosen to nurture God's very self in human flesh for 9 months. It's the story of liberation for all, forgiveness of debts, and of the past being ripe for transformation, not condemnation. This is the story of ordinary people doing ordinary things who dedicated themselves to following a 30-something Palestinian man who sought to erase the boundaries, tear down the walls, open the door to peace, and who took these men and women and said "I'm leaving, so it's your turn now."

Today is not about the flames or the many languages in and of themselves. Today, God has manifested God's in the form of the Holy Spirit and all the rules change. Today, we learn what we're about and are given what we need to be who God created us to be. You see, "without Pentecost," as Danielle Schroyer says, "we'd just be people who tell Jesus' story. With Pentecost, we're people who live into Jesus' story."¹

...i we will slow down and listen...if we're willing to be uncomfortable...if we dare to go and serve without knowing the outcome...if we come out of our hiding places and upper rooms and claim who we are.

Today we mark the gift of our belovedness and calling. The truth of the matter is that until today, only a few folks had actually known what it was to have the Spirit of God abiding in them. There was Saul and David, for example, and "the prophets...and so on. It was [otherwise] all very contained."² Everyone else just heard or read about this Spirit. Not anymore. Pauper or prince; man or woman; child or teacher; preacher or fisherman; unemployed or 30-year employee—they all receive the power and mission. Until this moment we didn't have the strength or equipment to do what "God needed us to do." The question for us is what will we do with that power our gifts, our existence?

Keep it safe and simple, worship on Sunday, and prayer here and there? Or, will we risk the safe, familiar, and comfortable in order to claim the gifts of God? I remember once asking the vestry a couple of years ago to write down at least three of their gifts—three things about themselves for which they are uniquely qualified and equipped. You would

¹ Danielle Schroyer, "We Don't Take Pentecost Seriously," *The Hardest Question* (blog) May 13, 2013, <http://thq.wearesparkhouse.org/new-testament/pentecostcnt/>.

² Ibid.

have thought I had asked them to explain the molecular compounds of the human cell. “Three?” Some said, “Yes, three, at least.” We’ve been conditioned to believe that claiming the gift that we are and receive is arrogant or cocky. But there’s a difference between boasting for boasting sake and acknowledging and nurturing the power that God has uniquely given you to be salt and light and healing and hope in the world. Too often we’re waiting for the “perfect moment” or when we retire or when the kids are grown or when we finish this or that...and for what?

God’s Spirit is not about what we can or can’t do on our own; She’s not the angel on your shoulder telling you to do good. She cannot be boxed in, and neither should the way you live your faith.

So you who are weary, tired and doubting, come.

You who are wondering if you have a place, come.

You who are thirsty, come.

You barely able to climb the steps, come and celebrate.

Come out of your hiding place, be it fear, worry, doubt, uncertainty, stress, and claim your place in the Greatest Show on earth. Come and live into your belovedness. Come because it’s not just about you—it’s about every person in here and outside of these doors.

We are many, but we are called to be one—not in agreement, but committed to the same mission of justice, healing, and mercy. So, as we said as kids in a game of Hide-’n-Seek: come out, come out, wherever you are...whoever you are. Because you can run, but you can’t hide.

Besides, why would you want to?

Welcome to the show.

Dr. Maria A. Kane
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Waldorf, MD
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