

2011-06-12 Pentecost - "***Living with Mystery***"  
by Sandy Cheatham

If you have experienced the death of a love one; you know about the tumultuous feelings that follow. The disciples of Jesus were mourning his death, ten days had passed since his ascension, and they had gathered with the Jewish community at large to celebrate the harvest festival. I am sure that there were those who were joyous because they believed, in fact had seen, Jesus risen from the grave. Others, having heard rumors about the ascension, were hopeful yet still doubtful. Then, there were those who had lost their faith and felt mournful, a-washed in grief...and still yet others, who were perhaps angry that this Jesus character was not who he proclaimed to be.

Some were surely huddled together in prayer while others kept to themselves. Some were fervently praying traditional prayers, others contemplating the bigger picture while others were wrestling with the finer details of life. Some were just pew warmers, going through the motions because that was what was expected.

Have you found yourself in the crowd yet? What are you doing? Feeling? Dwell there for a moment...

Suddenly, you are interrupted by a loud gush of wind. You feel warmth pour into you and every hair stands on end...something is amiss. Your attention is caught. You rush outside to see what is going on.

Being that is a traditional festival day, the streets are crowded. There are people with a variety of skin tones, male and female, young and old. Some who obviously are able to enjoy the finer things of life and some whose tattered clothing barely covers their body. Everyone is stopped, as if frozen by time, the wind dies down, and as people began to question, aloud, their experience you realize that everyone, regardless of their native tongue, is able to understand one another. The question of "what the heck is going on" begins to circulate and the tension filled chaos begins to build. Is it God? If so, what does the Holy One want? There are some who say its only intoxication, too many sips of wine, too early in the morning. What are you to do? Run and hide, stand and rejoice...you wait, hesitantly...

Then a loud voice quiets the crowd assuring you that this is the work of God... God is pouring out his spirit on you; giving comfort but asking you to pay it forward. Envision God's kingdom, for you are and will be given a glimpse of it.

The scripture ends there and we are left wandering... How does one go on with the rest of their day after that? Did the disciples return to prayer or did they go through the streets, mingling, hugging, and giving assurances? What did they think about as they lay down to go to sleep? Once again, I bet the reactions were mixed. Perhaps some were overwhelmed with the experience while others were at peace, contented. Human nature is a strange, unexplainable beast.

Recently, the winds have rushed throughout the world causing a lot of damage in the South and Midwest of the US, Southern Chile, and there is a hurricane brewing in the Pacific. The destruction leaves us struck with grief and questions. Where is God and what is God up to? I imagine the feelings

that follow a community's disaster whether by an "act of God" or through human destruction is similar to the feelings experienced by the disciples after the crucifixion of Christ. While there were those who had been reassured by his ascension, most probably felt bewildered, at a loss. Change is never easy; expectations hard to let go of. There is always the question of, "now what?" In the case of the ascension, "Now what do we do? Christ has returned to God where does that leave us? Who shall lead? Who is going to take care of us?"

How many times in life have your expectations not been met, your hopes destroyed? Were these not the questions that surrounded you? I remember when my cousin Shelbi was diagnosed with a brain tumor, she was five, about to enter school. Her parents were in the middle of a divorce, the whole family was settling in with the idea and then the unexpected, devastating news came and we were left asking Why and Now what? I was eight months pregnant with Jack, my second son, and on a ladder painting my bathroom. As the tears began to slide down my face and the paint dripped on the floor, I prayed fervently for God's guidance. I yelled at God about fairness –the family had been through 2 car wrecks, was in the middle of a divorce. I argued that they had faced enough already. I pleaded with God to let there be a mistake, to make it all go away. In the midst of my ranting and raving, pleading, crying, I felt a warmth slide through my body, every hair stood on end and I was assured that Shelbi would be ok; God was with her and the rest of the family. I immediately made the rounds of phone calls, assuring everyone...reminding them that we are not alone amidst the chaos. Shelbi just graduated from the sixth grade a few weeks ago and the same week her mother walked across the stage to get her bachelors. Her dad remarried, a nurse, and the whole gang is really, really close and supportive of one another. I could continue listing the blessings that have emerged but I shall move on, for now.

There is not always such blessed assurance amidst the chaos of life. Often we wander around grasping on to strings, hoping against hope, it'll get better. We celebrate Pentecost as a reminder that we are never alone. God is with us; sometimes pulling us along, other times pushing, but more often than not walking beside us. God gives us glimpses of his kingdom, both in dreams and visions, but also in the words from a friend and in the smile of a child. It is up to us to accept and move forward on making the vision a reality. Amidst the chaos of destructive storms and/or the loss of love one's what can you do to bring about the kingdom of God? Often, the blessed assurance comes through your presence; a warm plate of food also helps comfort the body and the soul! God has blessed each of us, with our own unique and wonderful life-giving gifts. I challenge you to spend a few moments seeking out and recording where you see the Spirit of the Divine this week. Are you being comforted, are you being called to act? The disciples recognized God and the pouring out of the Spirit and helped those around them navigate the chaos. You are also a disciple, a guide to the lost and confused.

Benediction:

Perplexing, Pentecostal God,  
you infuse us with your Spirit,  
urging us to vision and dream.

May the gift of your presence  
find voice in our lives,  
that our babbling may be transformed into discernment  
and the flickering of many tongues  
light an unquenchable fire of compassion and justice. Amen.