

Still a Love Story  
Acts 2:1-21  
Philippians 4:1-9

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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### Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will 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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

### Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

For months now, we have been telling a story. We began way back in September, with the words, “In the beginning.” Back then, I said that every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

If you are telling someone how your day went, your story has a beginning, when you got up, or when the story started to get interesting. The story has a middle, when the things happened that you’re telling them about. And the story has an end.

If you write a person’s biography, you start with where and when they were born. What circumstances attended this event? You proceed to the middle, which is when important things happened. And, if the story is over, you tell about the end, where and when and how they died.

The story of the universe is no different.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the Word was with God and the Word was God.<sup>1</sup> God created the universe.

That was the beginning of the story, the story of God and God’s people. The story of which each of us is a part.

The reason that we tell this story is that this story tells us who we are as Christians, and as human beings. We are not some cosmic accident. God breathed life into dirt and made human beings, both male and female, in God’s own image.<sup>2</sup> God set human beings to be stewards of creation. Not owners, but stewards, caretakers for the real owner. God made it all, it’s all God’s. Including us.

Over the months since September, we have heard highlights from this story. We’ve heard about matriarchs and patriarchs who followed God’s call into new lands and who created a new

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2.

people. We've heard about kings who boldly followed God's leading, and who just as boldly followed any leading but God's, often on the same day. We've heard about courageous and honest prophets whom God sent to guide kings and people alike when they went astray.

All through this story, since the very beginning, the story has been about love. God's love for God's people, and their love for God. Make no mistake, this is a love story.

And this story has been about relationships. The relationship between God and God's people, the relationships between God's people, and their relationships with the other people in the world.

All through this story, we've heard about sin, about how people keep messing up these relationships. People keep failing to love. People keep trying to make everything about themselves. They keep trying to restrict God to only loving people who look like them, or people who speak their language, or people who act like them. You see, that would give them an excuse to only love people who look like them, or people who speak their language, or people who act like them.

This tendency is not a new thing. It goes all the way back to the beginning of the story. This is one reason that this story tells us who we are: whether we like it or not, we are the same kinds of people we find in the Bible.

We heard good news of great joy, which is for all the people. That good news was that God loves all human beings, not just those descended from Abraham and Sarah, but all human beings, and wants them to have *Shalom*. *Shalom* is peace, and having enough, and security. Not being afraid. Not having reason to be afraid.

God wants so much for all human beings to have that, that God came into the world to bring it to us. That's what we celebrate at Christmas. God did not come into the world as a warrior at the head of an army of angels, to divide the world into good people and bad people and blow away all the bad people.

God wasn't willing to settle for just some of the people. God wanted us all. So God came into the world as a baby.

That baby's name was Jesus, or, literally, "God saves."<sup>3</sup> Jesus grew up, and he did wonders and he taught anyone who'd listen.

Jesus showed people God's love, and the way that God wanted to be in relationship with them. Jesus knew that all the people around him were God's children, and he treated them that way.

His very existence threatened the religious and political leaders of the time, because they had a twisted, loveless version of the relationship between God and God's people. The contrast between these power addicts and Jesus' teaching of love was painful to watch. So those religious and political leaders killed him. Slowly and painfully.

Jesus could have stopped them from killing him. He had the power to do another miracle and come down from the cross and deal with those people once and for all. But no, he loved us so much that he let them kill him, for us. He was killed for us, and for our sins.

But God raised him from the dead. Jesus appeared to his followers, and then he ascended into Heaven. He told his followers to stay where they were, and that a helper would come. They didn't really understand what he meant by that, but they trusted Jesus, so they did what he said.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ye-shua*, in the Hebrew.

Fifty days after Passover, a mighty wind comes through the house where Jesus' followers were in Jerusalem. Fire appears among them, and each of them begins to speak in the languages of other parts of the Roman world.

Some other people heard them, and asked, in effect, "Aren't all these people from one rural, unsophisticated area of Judea? How is it that we hear them talking, each of us, in our own native language? Turks, Jordanians, Iranians, and residents of Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Syrians, Judeans, and Asians, Kurds and Egyptians, Libyans and visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts, Greeks and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."<sup>4</sup>

Peter tells the story. He explains who Jesus is, and what he did, and what was done to him. He explains that God loves them, and that God wants them to love God and love their neighbors.

Many of the people who hear Peter take what he says to heart. About three thousand people repent of their sins, which means more than saying, "I'm sorry." It means changing your life. To mark this change, they are baptized, putting God's mark on them as belonging to God forever. God's people has expanded beyond one tribe in the wilderness to include people from all over the Roman world.

Those three thousand people go home after Pentecost. They go home and start churches where they live. They start teaching their friends and neighbors about this God who loves them and wants them to love other people, all the other people. Then they send people out to teach other people about this, and God's people expands again.

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:8-11, as exegeted in modern terms by Jennifer McGlinchey Gingras on the "Narrative Lectionary" Facebook group.

Now, nearly two thousand years later, our story, which began when God created the Heavens and the Earth, has definitively come to a middle.

The story is still about relationships.

And the story is still about love.

The story is still about God's amazing love for the world and about God's people loving God and loving our neighbors. Not just saying we love God and our neighbors. Really loving them. Love is not about you. Love is about them. Love is not selfish or self-centered. Love can change the world.

To quote the sermon that Bishop Michael Curry delivered yesterday,<sup>5</sup> you may have heard about it, "If you don't believe me, just stop and ... think and imagine a world where love is the way. Imagine our homes and families when love is the way. Imagine neighborhoods and communities where love is the way. Imagine governments and nations where love is the way. Imagine business and commerce when love is the way. Imagine this tired old world when love is the way.

"When love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive, ... when love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will 'let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.'<sup>6</sup> When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the Earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.<sup>7</sup> When love is the way, there's plenty good room, plenty good room, for all of God's

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLoGzo945S0>

<sup>6</sup> Amos 5:24

<sup>7</sup> "Down by the Riverside," Negro Spiritual. The rest of this song may be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down\\_by\\_the\\_Riverside](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_by_the_Riverside).

children, because when love is the way, we actually treat each other well, like we are actually family. When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all and we are brothers and sisters, children of God. My brothers and sisters, that's a new Heaven, a new Earth, a new world, a new human family.”

The Story of God and God’s people that we find in the Bible is not over.

It’s still a love story.

This week and every week, let’s work to bring that love to all the people around us.

AMEN.