

Dwelling in God

A Sermon on Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12 by the Rev. Philip Major
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We are dwelling in God. According to Paul Tillich, God is the ground of all being, so we are living within God's being. We may not feel the energy, we may not feel the comfort and security on a particular day, but we are moving and working, rising in the morning and sleeping at night, all within God's being.

We are dwelling in God, and our Jewish ancestors were also dwelling in God. They were travelling to the city of Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Shavuot, known to us as Pentecost. Our Jewish ancestors came to Jerusalem. There were very many of them, gathered together from all parts of the ancient world in one place. *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.* And they were able to understand one another, though the languages they heard were foreign to them. The people gathered together and they were surrounded and filled by God's spirit.

As we have heard in recent weeks in our Gospel readings, God's spirit is the spirit of truth and understanding. Truth and understanding are especially important for St. Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians he observes the many spiritual gifts, and how each one is activated by the Holy Spirit. Paul intentionally places the communication of knowledge and wisdom in the front of the list and speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues at the end of the list. In Paul's view of the church, the most important things are for us to just be together and for us to be growing in knowledge and wisdom.

We are abiding in God. The apostles and other Jews who came to Jerusalem for Pentecost understood that we often experience God's creativity and presence most powerfully when we are together with others who are intentional about seeking God.

Jesus said, "Whenever two or three of you are gathered in my name, I will be with you." Four is also a very good number for gathering together.

I learned that four can be a very good number from my grandchildren. There are young children who recognize me as their grandfather. Lincoln is in third grade and Piper is in kindergarten. Lincoln and Piper's dad is my stepson, Andrew. Andrew was divorced from the kid's mom around the time I first met him, five years ago.

Last summer Lincoln and Piper's dad cautiously introduced us to a woman who has come to be part of our family. She is the mother of Lincoln's best friend. The two adults got to know one another over the course of three years as the two boys went to birthday parties and play dates at each other's homes. Now the two families are together in one house, with two children from one family sharing one big bedroom with two children from another family, and the two adults now raising the four children as partners.

This has had a big impact at my house, because over the past year our blended, extended family has had three more people blended into it. The surprising thing is that when the whole family is together the four children play together constantly. When the four children are playing together their energy and creativity and joy are so powerful, it is almost like the joy and creativity described in the book of Acts.

One particular moment a few days ago encapsulates the joy and creativity of the four children playing together. The adults were finished eating in the dining room. I left the table to see what the grandchildren were up to, because, as usual, we hadn't seen much of them for the previous hour. I

found them playing school on the sunporch. At the moment I arrived they were having gym class in their play school. The kids were using the various fitness equipment on the sunporch. One child was using the rowing machine. Another child was using the chin-up bar, but more like a jungle gym.

Lincoln and Piper, the brother and sister, were using the elliptical machine. Together. This is kind of strange, because an elliptical machine is supposed to be used by one person. For adults it's kind of like a combination of running and cross-country skiing. But for my grandchildren the elliptical is a cooperative activity, because they are too small to get the weighted elliptical cylinder turning on their own. So Lincoln stood on one of the pedals and pulled on one of the levers, while Piper stood on the other pedal and pushed at the lever on her side. Up and down they went together, thrilled to riding on the machine together. Their smiles and giggles, their joy and wonder filled the room. It was like Pentecost for elementary school kids.

We are abiding in God. We often experience God's creativity and presence most powerfully when we are together with others who are intentional about abiding in God. This is the reason it was dangerous for us to be separated from one another during the pandemic. We cannot see God's spirit working in other people if we are separated from one another. We cannot hear God's voice speaking in the lives and voices of friends and strangers if we aren't permitted to be close to one another.

We are abiding in God, always. Yet, like the Jews gathering for Pentecost, we most often experience and know the joy and strength of God's presence around us when we are together with others who are deliberately seeking to know and abide in God.

This is one of the reasons we find great delight in the service of baptism. In the baptism liturgy we are recognizing and affirming yet another person who is deliberately seeking to dwell in the Spirit, in the energy and power of God.

There is some extra energy, some extra joy and creativity as we welcome a young child into the gathering of the members of the body of Christ. Perhaps there is extra joy because the little baby does not have a long list of things to accomplish this day. Vivian is merely dwelling in God. This is so obvious in her life.

Vivian is rising and eating and sleeping within God's being. So are you. Vivian is abiding in God's being. You and I are also abiding in God's being. We often distract ourselves from this most important truth of our lives by our busy schedules and many worries.

Let's take a cue from Vivian. Rest in God's being. Set aside at least a portion of your long list of duties in order to take some time to be aware that you are abiding in God.

Let's take a cue from the four grandchildren, playing together. Let's take time to be playful, together. Let's work creatively, together. Let's find joy in just being together.

You might think that time with God is a luxury that can only be enjoyed by young children or by those who have a comfortable life. St. Patrick would disagree. About four hundred years after the time of Christ, St. Patrick was captured by Irish pirates from his hometown on the west coast of Britain. Patrick was sixteen. He was taken to Ireland and sold as a slave. He was forced to work as a shepherd for six years. During his time as a shepherd, he came to understand that he was abiding in God.

Next Sunday we will sing St. Patrick's prayer: *Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

It was true for the great crowd of Jewish pilgrims at the festival of Pentecost. It was true for St. Patrick. It is true for my grandchildren. It is true for Vivian and it is true for you. We are abiding in God's love. Let us rejoice. Let us find our strength and joy together, abiding in God's love.