

Getting Up
Acts 2:1-21
First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota
June 4, 2017
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I love maps. I love all kinds of maps – physical, political, topographical. For the first five or ten years of my ministry, I had a three-dimensional topographical map of the mountains of western North Carolina on the wall of my church study. When I was in college, I would walk by Saunders Hall, the home of the geography department, and I would imagine all the treasures that could be found inside.

Years ago, whenever Father's Day would roll around, if all else failed our children knew that I would be pleased and amazingly fascinated by a simple Wal-Mart road atlas of the United States, a map they could purchase for less than ten bucks. This fascination hasn't changed as time has passed. I still sometimes lose myself in Google maps or Apple maps, finding my way around a great American city or dreaming of a cross-country trip.

I don't know how it happened. But I love maps.

You may still have the Bible your church presented to you in the third or fourth grade (or perhaps when you graduated from high school). In many of those Bibles, if you turn to the very back, you will find pages of maps – the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Palestine and Jerusalem during the life of Christ, the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul.

Right there, you can find the homes of all the Jews who had come to Jerusalem from all over for Pentecost. "Parthians, Medes, Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia; Pontus and Asia; Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and Libya and Rome, Cretans and Arabs." Jews of every age and shape and size gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks. They celebrated the wheat harvest and commemorated the day God gave the Torah, the law, to Moses and Israel.

The first few times a pastor reads through this long list of these regions and countries, he or she may be quite nervous, wondering and worrying about pronunciation. But after years of pastoral experience, she or he reads it with confidence, simply because very few of us know how to pronounce it all either.

You see, the point of Pentecost is the people – out there. Parthians, Medes and Elamites. Strangers to us, whose ways may seem funny and peculiar. People whose homes we may have to find on a map. God gave those first disciples the ability to speak in other languages so that they could share the good news of Jesus far and wide. God gives you and me the Spirit's power so that we can share the good news of Jesus out there.

"In That Great Gettin' Up Morning" is a well-known African-American spiritual. An African-American student brought this song to his instructors at the Hampton Institute not long after the Civil War. He shared that he heard it sung at secret midnight gatherings of slaves in the days before their liberation.

The lyrics speak of that great day to come, when Christ returns, when we are raised to be with the Lord. The words of the refrain sing the good news over and over again, "In that great gettin' up morning, fare ye well, fare ye well."

In that great getting up morning, we will see Christ face-to-face. In that great getting up morning, we will know glad reunion with our cherished loved ones. In that great getting up morning, we will go to be with the Lord forever.

But the point of Pentecost is the people out there, right now. The point of Pentecost is not only some supreme, cosmic consumer experience for us, for ourselves. The point of Pentecost is not the great good news only for me and you, that we will see Christ, that we will be God's forever.

The point of Pentecost is the spiritual power we receive to get up and go out and make a difference in the lives of Parthians and Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia and Judea and Cappadocia, men and women from Phrygia and Pamphylia, Cretans and Arabs.

Oh, I don't mean those places in particular. I mean places just beyond the reach of our imagination where we are called to share the good news of the gospel and to touch people with Christ's love: In the aisles of the supermarket. In the front yards of our neighborhood. In the home of our son and daughter-in-law. In the meetings of the county commission. On the streets with Caritas or Resurrection House or Family Promise, blessing the homeless of Sarasota.

Pentecost is about power, Holy Spirit power. We discover God's strength, driving us out there to speak and serve. We discover God's call, empowering us to get up and go, out there where the homeless gather and the hungry look for help and workforce families wonder if they will ever save enough for a tiny apartment for their family.

God empowers us to get up and go to those who feel devastated by the divorce or loss in a career that's turning out far different than they first thought. To get up and go to the ten- or fourteen-year-old who distracts herself with her smartphone so often that she is not sure anymore what really matters. To get up and go and to hold the hand of the older adult who has not been touched by another human being in weeks.

God's power shakes us up in worship. The Spirit comes in the words and stories of the scripture and sermon. The Spirit comes in the beauty of the music played and sung. The Spirit comes in the still small voice of the silence.

The Spirit comes. The Spirit changes us. The Spirit sends us out. The Spirit sends us out with power.

Jana Childers describes it this way. "Sometimes the power of the Spirit in worship services resembles the vision of the poet and theologian Amos Wilder: 'The world is molten and hearts are sifted. The [table] is like a third rail that shatters sparks. The sanctuary is like the chamber next to an atomic oven.' Spiritual power can create thundering choirs, soaring rhetoric, over the top [music], and sermons that rock with joy. It can create congregations who sing with their hearts in their faces, pray without ceasing, and extend themselves for others."

This is the promise of Pentecost. God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and you shall prophesy, and you shall see visions, and you shall dream dreams. The point of Pentecost is the people – out there, and the spiritual power we receive to love and serve them and to tell them about Jesus and his love.

Three years ago in 2014, our church reached a turning point. Our buildings were beginning to deteriorate. We were still almost half a million dollars in debt. We had to do a gut check. We had to answer the question: Do we believe in Jesus? Do we believe in this church? Do we believe in renewal? Do we believe in Pentecost power? Will we reach deep into our hearts and deep into our pockets to make a difference?

You see the answer all around you today. In our sanctuary and organ, in our courtyards and educational building, in our fellowship hall, in the elimination of our debt.

Our buildings are renewed. Thanks be to God.

But we must continue to imagine. "Imagine the Future" is the name of our capital initiative. The task force did not pick that title quickly. No, they selected it with care and prayer. It reminds us today that we are called to be lively Christians, with energy and commitment, eager to keep getting up and going out into God's world in the name of Jesus Christ. We give glory to God, who by the power at work through us is able to do far more than we can imagine.

Will we make our way beyond these walls to the Parthians, Medes and Elamites of Sarasota and the world? God will give us the words. God will show us the way.

Will we proclaim that God's great love is all about people? God will give us the strength to love and tell our neighbors, our friends, our adversaries, our enemies.

We may be uncomfortable. We may be uncertain. We may pretty sure that God should call someone else.

But let this be the gettin' up morning for us. Let us imagine what God can do. Let us get up and go out to sing and share, to proclaim and persevere, to make a difference in the name of the Lord, reaching one more person for Jesus. Amen.