

Whispers of the Wind
A sermon for the Day of Pentecost, May 23rd, 2010
at Sts. Peter and Paul Lutheran Church, Riverside, Illinois
Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17

Lord Jesus, love and truth of the Father, you came to earth to relieve the pain of our exile; you took our weakness as your own. When our hearts grow faint, uphold us until we stand with you before God and praise your name forever.

Quidditch was missing. For about six days the week before last, the parsonage cat was gone, and gone for good, we thought. Years ago, when some friends brought this homeless kitten to us from the Wisconsin State Fair, the kids gave him the name Quidditch which is, as some of you well know, a fictional sport played in the ever popular *Harry Potter* series. We've had Quidditch in our home for nearly eleven years, even before there was life for us in Riverside. He has grown up with Sam, Isaac and Olivia, and, like most cats, considers himself more than just another member of the family; he is "master of the house; keeper of the inn."

Quidditch is a friendly, sociable, affectionate fellow who, even in mid-life, has managed to remain quite happy, playful, and independent—commendable traits I'd say for someone our age. He's an outdoor cat, coming and going as he pleases most of the time, well-respected and much-appreciated by neighbors as a skilled hunter. Unlike some members of our household, the cat has never complained about keeping curfew. Before the door is locked about midnight, he's ready to be let in, only occasionally showing up at the backdoor near daybreak. So, a couple weeks ago on a Sunday evening when he didn't come home on time, nor at dawn, nor by noon the next day, Jane and I literally started beating the bushes around the house and church. Search parties were sent out after school. Neighbors were asked to be on watch. Fliers were posted on Maplewood Road. "He's never done this before," I whispered to myself, "something must have happened." I took a walk along the DesPlaines River looking for remains.

You need to remember that where I grew up, the average life-span of a cat is usually a little more than a year, and that of a dog maybe two or three, so I was rather taken by surprise at my reaction to this whole affair and even more surprised that the experience would show up in a sermon. (Sometimes you're just desperate for material!) And yet, I hear from St. Paul that ". . . the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption (the return) of our bodies."

You see, our home was sick with sadness. Our hearts groaned with grief. There was an emptiness that accompanies absence and a waiting for redemption. Each night as I went to lock the door, I would step out on the front porch, gaze across the street for a fleck of white, and whisper something in the wind, I'm not sure just what. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness," Paul says, "for we don't know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words"—whispers in the wind.

Of course, the story has a happy ending which came last Saturday night following an absolutely magnificent wedding reception. Just before we arrived home, the prodigal cat had returned, dreadfully homesick for his family, I think, starving for something to eat, and generally suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder—fur frizzed, ribs exposed, filthy coat and seriously disoriented, not the first one in our family to come in such a state. Where he had been, we're still not sure.

The move from absence to presence is a move that the psalmist describes as "from mourning to dancing," from grief to joy, from silence to praise: "You have turned my mourning into dancing," she sings, "you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent."

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This is the move from Ascension absence to Pentecost presence, from Jesus' absence after his

Ascension to his presence at Pentecost today. When Philip had approached Jesus with the plaintive cry, “Show us. . . show us the Father and [then] we will be satisfied,” he spoke for all of us who are longing for union with some one or some thing or some time from which we are now separated. We often call this vague feeling of separation, this dis-ease in the soul, we call it homesickness, the longing for a place where souls can rest.

“Peace I leave with you,” Jesus says to his friends, “my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. . . I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

In a novel entitled, *The Gramercy Winner*, a character by the name of Will Grey confides in his psychologist, Dr. Scanlon: “What’s the matter, Willy?” the doctor asks. “I don’t know, Scanlon,” he replies, “I’m homesick.” “How long have you been homesick?” “All my life.”

One of the most persistent themes in Scripture is this dislocation of human hearts from the heart of God. The psalms speak both of a longing to “dwell in the house (the household, the family, or presence) of the Lord” and of a longing to see God’s face. The prophet Jeremiah describes our dissatisfaction as lasting as long as our yearning for God remains unfulfilled. We are, he says, like “cracked cisterns that can hold no water.” Philip says today, “Lord, show us the Father, and we’ll be satisfied.”

No matter what we obtain, what we acquire, what we depend upon, what we achieve, who we have become, we remain unsatisfied, longing for a deeper presence of God like “cracked cisterns that can hold no water.” Anyone who has wrestled with addictions (haven’t we all?) knows that whether it’s alcohol or food, drugs or sex, shopping or the Internet, all of these things run through us as though we were a cracked cistern leaving us feeling even emptier than we were before them. So, the author of Ephesians prays “that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. . . .”

“Have I been with you all this time,” Jesus asks Philip and us, “and still you don’t know me? . . . Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” On that day, from the four winds of the Mediterranean, they come home—they come home to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, a season of seven weeks of gladness, beginning with the harvest of barley during Passover and ending fifty days later with the harvest of wheat at Pentecost. So, our seven weeks of Easter, the Great Fifty Days of the church year, have been for us a season of gladness, beginning on Easter morning with the “first fruits” of Jesus’ resurrection and ending today on Pentecost with the harvest of those “who have the first fruits of the Spirit.”

Luke tells us that “. . . there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem” on this fiftieth and final day of the Feast of Weeks. And even though they didn’t speak the same language, at Pentecost they could remember their common identity as Jewish people, and the great gifts of the land and the Law. They could remember their home in Jerusalem: “Jerusalem, my happy home, when shall I come to thee?” we sing in that wonderful hymn of hope, “When shall my sorrows have an end? The joys when shall I see?” And on that day “a sound like the rush of a violent wind . . . filled the entire house where they were sitting. . . All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” The story says they were filled; no longer cracked cisterns but filled.

It was the French mathematician, philosopher and physicist, Blaise Pascal, who wrote, “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man [and woman] which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” “This is the Spirit of truth. . . You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” In Corinthians, Paul writes that “. . . anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

No longer is there that emptiness inside. Homesickness no longer casts a shroud over our hearts. The promise Jesus made to Philip has been fulfilled, “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Pentecost in the Gospel of John happens when the risen Jesus stands among his cowering disciples and breaths on them saying, “Peace be with you. . . Receive the Holy Spirit.” Receive the Holy Spirit that creates a community which prays “in Jesus’ name,” transcending every barrier of race, class, gender, language and culture. For the Spirit is at work

wherever there is gratitude and praise. The Spirit is at work wherever there are “sighs too deep for words.” The Spirit is at work wherever there is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” the fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit is at work as the “whole creation groans in labor pains” giving birth to new life. The Spirit is at work wherever “young people prophesy” against injustice and “see visions” of hope and wherever elders still “dream dreams” of a better world.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”