

## **Making the Marginal Miraculous**

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston  
Day of Pentecost  
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This evening, along with the Church throughout the world, we mark the Feast of Pentecost, the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Resurrection of Jesus, a day that marks the coming of the Holy Spirit. It's the festival of the church that's most near and dear to my heart for many reasons. One of which is a very self-centered reason. Pentecost is a reminder. The coming of Pentecost reminds me of the coming of my wedding anniversary. My wife Faye and I were married on the eve of Pentecost, and I'll be honest - I'm **the** stereotypical male when it comes to remembering dates of any kind. Pentecost has a wonderful way of keeping me in my wife's good graces. I love Pentecost.

There's more to Pentecost than God's providence for my domestic tranquility. I love Pentecost for another reason. Pentecost reminds us that God is about the business of reaching out to the world. On Easter, Jesus rises from the dead, and on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to take that amazing news to the whole world. Pentecost is God's reaching out to the very ends of the earth to gather God's people. It's humbling for me in a way that I can barely explain. No matter where you come from. No matter who you are. Whether you are highborn or lowborn, lowbrow or highbrow, Pentecost represents God's call to each and every one of us. From the farthest parts of the world to the deepest darkness of the human condition, God is gathering a people and making them Holy. Today we celebrate our God who takes the marginal and makes the miraculous.

Pentecost reminds me of something else. From the beginning God has been gathering a people from the world's margins. That Bedouin couple named Sarah and Abraham - called from Mesopotamia by an unknown God. This unknown God promises to gather a people through them as numerous as the stars in the sky. Then there's Moses chosen to lead God's people out of Egypt - a stuttering murderer becomes the savior of God's people. There's Rahab the prostitute who makes Israel's entry into promised land possible. A woman at the margins called into the people of God. Do you remember the story of Ruth? A widow left penniless and hopeless, yet through her God brings the line of Jesse with David and Solomon, those hero kings of old. What sermon about the margins would be complete without John the Baptist, that wonderful weirdo from the wilderness who eats bugs and honey and calls out to the people of God? And in the fullness of time comes Jesus, that marginal Jew of modest means and the savior of the world. Today we celebrate our God; the God who takes the marginal and makes it miraculous.

We hear it in Peter's sermon, those wonderful words of the prophet Joel that show God's intent from the begging:

“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."

Sons and daughters, young and old, slave and free called from the margins and made miraculous.

Pentecost also reminds me that God's gathering of a people isn't past tense. God continues to take the marginal and make it miraculous. I'm reading more about my hero Abraham Lincoln this summer. In particular I am reading the wonderful biography of Richard Carwardine entitled *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*. In it Carwardine looks across the career of Lincoln for those moments prior to his presidency when hints of greatness peaked through that tall, gangly, disheveled exterior. Lincoln, that son of Kentucky and then Illinois dirt farmers, undereducated, underfed, underappreciated and called from the margins of the American frontier to guide our nation through its greatest chaos.

In the early months of 1856 as Lincoln's Whig party was disintegrating and a new **moderate** Republican Party was rising from the ashes, Lincoln experienced a Pentecost of his own. The otherwise subdued, calculating and cautious Lincoln caught fire in the fight against slavery. And so his partner and biographer William Herndon wrote these words, "Now he was baptized and freshly born. He had the fervor of a new convert; the smothered flame broke out; enthusiasm unusual to him blazed up; his eyes were aglow with inspiration; he felt justice; his heart was alive to the right; his sympathies, remarkably deep for him, burst forth, and he stood before the throne of the eternal Right."

Our God always has been and always will be a God who takes the marginal and makes it miraculous. This is Pentecost's greatest reminder.

We all come from the margins in some way shape or form. We come from lives sometimes whole and sometimes broken. We come from families sometimes whole and oft times broken. And here is the truth: We are all called from the margins of this desert life, in order to be miraculously made part of a people as numerous as the stars of the sky - God's holy people. Within us on this day dwells a Holy Spirit. It's a spirit that brings us the Good News of Jesus' new life. It's a Spirit that wants to show us the miracle of God's love. It's a Spirit that calls us from our margins and wants to make us miraculous.

*Amen*