

Keep It Down In There!

Pentecost 2018

In the name of the one who names us and claims us and makes us his own, Amen.

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard as a kid, “For God’s sake, keep it down in there!” Or every time I said it as an adult. But it’s only now that I wonder, why “for God’s sake”? Do we think that God wants it to be quiet?

Admittedly, we certainly act like we do. It’s loud out there, it’s confusing out there, there’s so much..’out there’...out there. God *must* be found in order, in quiet and in predictability. Peter Nimmo, a Scottish minister from Inverness, thinks that urge may be primal, that our very first religious stirrings are prehistoric, beginning with our need to survive against an unforgiving nature. He says that “when you live in a cave, when you’ve got to hunt for your food to survive, you are involved in a constant battle against nature. And nature is frightening, and it’s noisy. Sitting in your cave at night, you would hear noises all the time. The noise of birds and animals in the forest. The wailing of wolves. The sound of the wind in the trees, of the thunder in the clouds.” He points out that now we know what these things are, but imagine that you are a caveman and you have no idea what causes these sounds. “Little wonder”, he adds, “that ancient people decided that nature was full of gods, spirits, demons and sprites. Those mysterious noises were what created the primitive awe which would one day develop into religion”.

So like so many of us who come to church to get away from all the noise out there, maybe not wolves but street noise, crowds and television, and hope to encounter God in quiet and predictability, we hear today, on Pentecost, how the disciples sat inside, with the doors and windows closed. In silence. Reverend Nimmo imagines the scene:

“For forty days, they’ve been trying to make sense of Easter. The tomb was empty, the stone had been rolled away, and then more and more of them met their friend, until the visions stopped and it appeared that he had left them. Yet Jesus had promised them a ‘Helper’. Who, or what, would that helper be?” He continues, “And so they gathered together, early in the morning, in a safe house somewhere, unsure about what will happen next, about what they should do next. I can imagine them sitting silently, in prayer, straining to hear what God wants them to do next”.

Well, they were in for quite a surprise. “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting”. Even leaving the tongues of fire part aside, this was not the gentle descent of a dove and it was scary and it was LOUD. The heavens were not silent. God came to them, not in the safety of their silence, but in noise.

That noise lifted them from their knees, out of the safe house and into the marketplace, into the loud and confused world, into Jerusalem, the powder-keg where, Nimmo describes, people of all

ances have come to seek after God. “Christianity had literally burst out of nowhere to change lives and to change the world. Christianity had started to be a big noise in the world.” Now, two thousand years later, perhaps the church has become too silent with too little heavenly noise.

If you look in the rack in front of you in your pew, you may see a little green card. It’s a reminder to all of us of one of the most delightful ways God makes God’s presence known to us, not in silence but in the voices of children. Like the thundering wind that filled the silent, safe house, children bring us the sounds of heaven and a reminder that God is to be found in the noisy places of the world.

Today we welcome into our St Peter’s family Kieran Glinka Gill, who will now be referred to, at least by me, by his rapper name, The Notorious KGG. And I wonder what HIS church will be like as he grows up. What will he learn about his place in the world and where will he look for God? In the quiet places? Well, not so far. As we just said, God also lives in the noisy places of the world. God lives on the street, on the bus or in a prison. Where will the Spirit drive him? As his family, how can we show him examples of the courage that could take?

To think about what that loud, God-filled world might be like, who better to consult than a Pentecostal preacher. Peter Leithart, who among his other qualifications, has with his wife ten children and nine grandchildren. I imagine he is a man who knows about noise. A Spirit-filled society as he describes it would be boisterous, not really drunk at nine in the morning but filled with a new wine. The curse on languages that took place in Babel has been reversed and the divided nations have been reunited.

Oh, I can only hope for a reuniting of the divided nations. We certainly are not there yet.

So has the vision of a Spirit-filled society let us down? I don’t think so. But I do think that living out that promise is hard, recognizing the presence of the Spirit is hard. We have been talking over the past few weeks about how the church is changing, how our vision of where we are being pushed to find God is leading us out, away from the comfortable quiet in the sanctuary into the noise of the streets, into the sound of the blowing wind. Did I mention that this is not easy? That noise is scary?

Urging us to keep the faith, David Lose reminds us that the “Spirit doesn’t solve our problems, but invites us to see possibilities we would not have seen otherwise. Rather than remove our fear, the Spirit grants us courage to move forward. Rather than promise safety, the Spirit promises God’s presence. Rather than remove us from a turbulent world, or even settle in the turbulence, The Spirit enables us to keep our footing amid the tremors.”

We can’t promise that the world that The Notorious KGG will grow up in will be safe. Or that the nations will be reunited or that it will even be quiet. I imagine it will still be filled with strident voices and loud opinions. All we can do is make a promise that we will be open to spiritual transcendence. That we will be with him and with his family wherever they are blown.

That powerful wind that brought the Spirit into the closed, safe place will, like on the first Pentecost shake us. Pastor Lose describes “fire and wind, turning everything upside down, uniting the separated and inviting everyone to be part of God’s community. Diversity becomes a blessing, not a source of alienation- there is no in or out, or superior or inferior, but a democracy of the spirit embracing the least and the most as equal recipients of divine inspiration.”

We need more heavenly noise. The noise of a wind which will blow away the cobwebs, which will fill the church and our lives, which will send us noisily out into the world, making noise for God in the midst of our noisy world. So welcome, Kieran. Welcome to this loud, messy world that is now a little bit more God-filled with your presence among us. We’ll try not to tell you to just keep it down in there, for God’s sake.

Amen.