

“Rise Up” a sermon on Acts 2:1-18

A couple of weeks ago I was polling kids between the ages of 4 and 10 about growing up. I started by asking them “what’s hard about growing up?” One of them said, “it hurts!” And that’s true. Your bones can ache they are working so hard at growing. Another kid says “the homework gets harder.” Oh third-grader, you have no idea what’s coming. “Then I asked them what’s good about growing up?” Each kid had a few things to say about this. They said things like “you can drive, get a job and once you’re 18 you don’t have to listen to your parent’s rules anymore—unless you live in their house.” They also had some pretty interesting ideas about what they would do all day, given the choice. “You can sleep all day, eat all day and play video games all day.” And, you don’t have to go to school!

I suspect that by the standards these 4-10 year olds set, the seniors who graduated on Friday night would be considered “grownups.”

Do you agree?

Does that terrify you?

Any answer is ok.

On his tumblr a couple of weeks ago Neil Gaimon told an insightful story. If you don’t know him, he’s been in the news lately because he wrote *American Gods*, which was recently made into a tv show. He also did the graphic novel *Sandman* and the story that became the movie *Coraline*. Anyhow, the story he tells goes something like this.

Some years ago, I was lucky enough invited to a gathering of great and good people: artists and scientists, writers and discoverers of things. And I felt that at any moment they

would realize that I didn't qualify to be there, among these people who had really done things.

On my second or third night there, I was standing at the back of the hall, while a musical entertainment happened, and I started talking to a very nice, polite, elderly gentleman about several things, including our shared first name. And then he pointed to the hall of people, and said words to the effect of, "I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They've made amazing things. I just went where I was sent." And I said, "Yes. But you were the first man on the moon. I think that counts for something."

And I felt a bit better. Because if Neil Armstrong felt like an imposter, maybe everyone did. Maybe there weren't any grown-ups, only people who had worked hard and also got lucky and were slightly out of their depth, all of us doing the best job we could, which is all we can really hope for.

Being an adult at 18, 38 or 78 is sometimes hard. Believing that we really are unique and capable of being part of creatively making the world a better place? Somedays I'm not sure I believe I'll make it through the day.

I find that faith helps.

Things are changing right now.

Pam is moving to Colorado and you all are welcoming four new staff members!

When times are changing, I find that faith helps.

By this point you are hopefully wondering why I find that faith helps me make it through the day and believe I am part of bettering the world despite knowing full well that things are changing.

In the two sections you heard a few minutes ago from the book of Acts (which tells the story of the beginning of what would become the Christian church) in this story from Acts we heard about how the Spirit came over a crowd of people in a bizarre way. The Bible has lots of words for this Spirit: wind, flame, breath, dove, word, comforter, Spirit. Here the Spirit shows up and speaks to each person there using words they understood. As Brian McLaren puts it, “The Spirit isn’t restricted to one elite language or one superior culture, as almost everyone had assumed. Instead, the Spirit speaks to everyone everywhere in his or her own language.”

And this is only the beginning. The Spirit shows up again and again and again. Peter is one of the people who had been following Jesus and is a classic example of an imperfect person. He rushes into things too quickly, makes assumptions without all the facts, can be pretty stubborn and around the time of Jesus’ execution, Peter says he doesn’t even know Jesus. He makes tons of mistakes, which makes him all the more real. I think that what Peter heard the Spirit say to him that day, rushing about in tongues of fire, is “Rise up! You’ve got this. Now get up and lead!”

In the second part of the Acts reading, Peter begins his first-ever-Spirit-filled sermon with words from the prophet Joel. Quoting Joel, Peter tells the people that every one of them has received a gift; the Spirit has been poured into them. Men, women, young old, slave and free. The Spirit is part of them now.

Us too.

Every person here.

Men, women, young old, slave, free, Christian, agnostic, uncertain, spiritual but not religious. God’s Spirit is in us, speaking to us in words and language we understand.

God's Spirit does not fit into carefully packaged box [sometime we call that box religion].

This is why, for me, faith helps me make it through the day and believe I am part of bettering the world despite knowing full well that things are changing.

I trust the Spirit is there and I listen to her.

And I want to encourage you to do the same. Open yourself up to the possibility that this universal Spirit is speaking to you and pays attention to how you respond to his nudges. Whatever you have planned for June 5, school, work, hanging with friends, the Spirit has a task—even a call—for you and your life.

We all sometimes feel inadequate. I'm heading off to be a youth director in Red Wing and I don't have the ability to discipline my own kids to bring their plates to the dishwasher. How am I supposed to keep a youth group focused? Or a room full of first graders? I don't have a clue! Who thought I could do this?

And then I listen and the Spirit reminds me I'm uniquely equipped for this job, this ministry that I'm heading to in Red Wing. In fact sometimes the Spirit reminds me I have the potential to change hearts and lives and to help the children and youth know they are loved, they matter and they are part of how God is bettering the world.

Just like you. As you listen to this unique Spirit, speaking your language, may you hear what you need to make it through the day and believe you are part of bettering the world despite knowing full well that things are changing.

Pastor Amanda Larsen