

More Vile

Day of Pentecost

Introduction

This Sunday is Pentecost, and it's also the beginning of a new six-week series: *Wesleyan Vile-tality*. The series takes its name from Dr. Ashley Boggan's book, which asks what it would look like for The United Methodist Church to reclaim its original identity as a movement of people willing to go where they weren't supposed to go and say what they weren't supposed to say. The title comes from John Wesley's journal entry of April 2, 1739, when he “submitted to be more vile” and preached in the open fields of Bristol to coal miners and laborers the established church had ignored.

We begin this series on Pentecost because the Holy Spirit has always been the inspiration that calls people past their starting points. The Spirit sent Wesley into Bristol's fields, filled a room in Jerusalem, and scattered the disciples into the streets. This week, we read two passages showing us the Spirit's inspiring power: among Eldad and Medad in the camp, and among a bewildered crowd at Pentecost. Both stories invite us to consider what happens when God's Spirit refuses to stay where we put it.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9FGsJ3PYVw>

In this clip from Finding Nemo (2003), Marlin loses the only clue to finding his son and is ready to give up. Dory's response: “Just keep swimming.”

Why This Video?

Marlin has just lost the one thing he believed could lead him to his son. He dives after it, but the deeper he goes, the darker it gets, and he has to come back up empty-handed. He is panicking, furious, and ready to quit. And the one next to him doesn't seem to understand.

Dory's “just keep swimming” is not a strategy. She doesn't know where they're going. She doesn't even grasp what they've lost. Marlin doesn't want a song; he wants the mask back, the only clue to finding Nemo. But the song gets in his head anyway. Sometimes the people who seem the least equipped to help are the ones who keep us going. Their only answer is instinct: face forward, don't stop, and just keep swimming.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Marlin and Dory have just survived being nearly crushed by a submarine, and now the mask is gone. Sometimes one crisis follows another without a pause. When have you had to keep going through one setback after another?
2. Marlin is convinced the mask was his “only chance.” When have you been so focused on one path forward that losing it felt like losing everything?
3. Marlin dives into the abyss after the mask, but the deeper he goes, the darker it gets, and he has to come back up. When have you pursued something into a dark place and realized you had to stop and find another way?
4. Marlin's first reaction is to blame Dory: “You dropped it.” When have you lashed out at someone in a moment of panic? What was really going on?

5. Dory calls Marlin “Mr. Grumpy Gills” in the middle of his crisis. Sometimes people respond to our pain in ways that feel dismissive. When has someone’s response to your struggle felt completely off, and did your view of it change later?
6. Dory doesn’t fully grasp what’s happened, and yet her response, “just keep swimming,” is what keeps them moving. Have you ever received encouragement from someone who didn’t understand your situation, and it turned out to be exactly what you needed?
7. The song gets stuck in Marlin’s head even though he doesn’t want it there. When has someone’s words or example kept coming back to you long after the moment passed, even when you resisted it at first?

Acts 2:1-21 (CEB)

¹When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. ⁴They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

⁵There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. ⁷They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? ⁸How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), ¹¹Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” ¹²They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” ¹³Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!”

¹⁴Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! ¹⁵These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning! ¹⁶Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. ²⁰The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes. ²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Numbers 11:24-30 (NRSVue)

²⁴So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered seventy of the elders of the people and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders, and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

²⁶Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying

in the camp.”²⁸ And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!”²⁹ But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

Scripture Study Questions

1. When have you experienced something happen in the life of a community that was genuinely surprising, maybe even disorienting? What was your first reaction: curiosity, excitement, the impulse to explain it away? Maybe something else?
2. In the Numbers passage, Joshua hears that Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp and immediately says, “My lord Moses, stop them!” Moses responds, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” Why do you think these two reactions were so different? Do you see reactions like either of these? Do you see Joshua’s reaction or Moses’ reaction more often?
3. Eldad and Medad were registered to go to the tent but stayed in the camp, and the spirit rested on them anyway. What does it tell you that the Spirit showed up where it was not expected and among people who did not follow the prescribed process?
4. In Acts 2, the crowd is divided: some are amazed, others jeer, “They’re full of new wine!” Why is it so easy to dismiss what we do not understand? What would it have taken to stay curious in that crowd instead of searching for an explanation?
5. Peter quotes Joel: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” Dr. Ashley Boggan, the historian whose book *Wesleyan Vile-tality* inspires this series, argues that Wesley’s willingness to “submit to be more vile” was that same instinct: the gospel belongs to everyone, and reaching those who have been excluded requires leaving the building. Where do you see that instinct alive today, and where do you see it resisted?
6. Peter stands before a mocking crowd and declares, “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel.” What does it take to stand in front of people who have already made up their minds and say, “You’re looking at this wrong”? When have you had to do that, and what did it cost you?
7. Moses says, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” Peter declares that the Spirit falls on all people. May 24 is also Aldersgate Day, when Wesley described his heart being “strangely warmed.” Dr. Boggan argues that an even greater turning point came when Wesley chose to “submit to be more vile” and preach in Bristol’s open fields to people the church had overlooked. What would it look like for our congregation to expect the Spirit beyond our walls, in people and places we have not authorized?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. When have you been the only person responsible for something that was really a group effort? How did it feel to do all the work? If someone else eventually stepped up, how did that feel, and how did the group respond?
2. Can you think of a time when someone made others uncomfortable by stepping into a leadership role? What happened, and what do you think was behind the discomfort?
3. Where in your life, or in the life of the church, do you see people deciding who is and isn’t authorized to lead, teach, or speak?
4. What might it mean for you to be someone through whom God speaks? What would that require, and what would you have to give up?
5. In Numbers 11:29, Moses says, “If only all the Lord’s people were prophets.” If Moses were here today, how do you think he would finish the sentence: “I wish that all God’s people...”

Weekly Action

This week, ask yourself: what does being Methodist mean to you? Not the institution, not the denomination's recent (or even past) history, but the tradition itself. What about Methodism matters to your faith? If someone asked you why you're Methodist, what would you tell them? Consider your answer. If it helps, write it on a piece of paper or in a note on a digital device. As we begin this series, it's worth knowing what you believe before you're asked to explore something new.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, wind and fire and language we did not expect: you fill rooms, and then you empty them. You send us out of sanctuaries and into open fields, beyond our comfort, beyond our credentials, beyond every wall we have built to keep the gospel manageable. Make us a people who expect you to show up where we have not gone yet. Give us the courage to follow, the honesty to confess where we have chosen respectability over faithfulness, and the willingness to look foolish for the sake of your love. Pour out your Spirit on all of us, authorized and unauthorized alike, and make us prophets of a grace we did not earn and cannot contain. Amen.