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 Texts: Acts 2:1-12
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A Parade of Spirits: And Everyone Was Filled
"How we spend our days is how we spend our lives."
 -Annie Dillard

My husband Paul and I got out of the taxi at the American Military Cemetery in Florence, Italy. I was on my sabbatical and as part of this pilgrimage, we were hoping to find the grave of my great uncle Bobby.

In my research I discovered Bobby had died on July 13th, 1944. His cemetery record notes that he was killed in action and died of wounds in the Rome-Arno Campaign earning him a purple heart. Scholars describe 1944 as a particularly bloody year with hard fighting against the Germans through some brutal weather and mountainous terrain.

Among the archival material I found on the internet was Bobby's draft card. Seeing his neat and steady hand, his perfect penmanship, his signature which seemed to match my grandfather's perfectly brought more tears.

Standing under the blue Tuscan sky, we wept as we took in the thousands of rows of endless white crosses sprinkled with the occasional Jewish Star of David. The only sound on that day was the birds singing wildly as we reached row 4, grave #28.

The kind, Italian official guiding us to the spot ceremoniously carried a metal pail of sand and two small flags, one Italian and one, American. Together, he and I rubbed the sand (from a Normandy beachhead he told me) onto the alabaster stone and watched as Bobby's name, date and regiment appeared.

A warm breeze swept through the cemetery and we said a prayer for the parade of spirits buried here and all who died in that bloodiest of wars –and every war since. *Currently there are 32 countries at war at the moment around the globe! Yes, 32 countries at war as we sit here.*

On this Memorial Day weekend, we take the time to remember. Remember as a community the lives sacrificed and lost, we remember, too, the soldiers who have come home to live a new chapter of their lives. We remember the struggles they face and the families waiting at the door. We remember on whose shoulders we stand approaching these days with reverence and knowing that for many there is only sorrow. There are something like 16.5 million veterans in our country...and many living with PTSD and mental anguish.

The inner and outer work of remembering is sacred work. The rituals we create and engage in don't take away the pain of grief but they do, as author, Frances Weller, wrote, "offer us a way home." And one Jesus invited his disciples and community to participate in over and over again as he called those on the margins to mealtimes and mountaintops to heal and remember -that all are beloved and invited to the feast. "*Do this in memory of me*", he taught the disciples in that upper room at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19).

The story of Pentecost comes to us today in the midst of our busy lives. This promised new life in the Spirit is one churches are celebrating all over the world today as the symbolic birthday of the church.

According to the story in Acts, there was quite a crowd there in that famous upper room: Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas and more including Mary, the mother of Jesus and other women were all together in one place...A wild wind swept through those walls blowing open their ordinary ways of being and relating to one another. An

international crowd gathered with a multitude of different languages and stories, fear and hopes and divisions and opinions then, the gift is given. Miraculously, amidst the linguistic mayhem and parade of languages, some kind of unity and mutual understanding emerged. The spirit of God, empowering each one to not only speak but listen, not only to awaken but to hear, not only to receive but to understand their neighbors— through their honored differences. Imagine! *No one is lost in translation!*

The apostles and the crowd will spend the rest of their lives figuring out the answer to their question: *What does this mean? What does this mean for us now?*

Writes one scholar about the Pentecost moment, “The miracle is how the Spirit equips each of the disciples to speak someone else’s language. To meet people where they are.”

What does this mean? This *breath of life, the “ruah” of the same spirit that hovers over us in the beginning of life and also meets us at our end.*

Truly I think of the Spirit as akin to Tina Turner –and that LOVE has something to do with it. I like to think of the Breath of God shaking up that Jerusalem crowd as the bold breeze kicked up and the fire swirled around them getting them up out of their chairs and into the streets. The language of love on the loose.

There are two spirited parades on my calendar. The first is happening next Saturday, the Middletown Pride parade where 20,000 revelers danced and twirled along Main street, all kinds of folk celebrating their uniqueness and their common ground. Dignity and joy. No separation, only mutual understanding that wherever one locates themselves on the LBGTQplus human spectrum, you are welcome to the party. Whatever your pronouns, your grammar of love, you are welcome to join the parade.

This crowd knows about deep pain and marginalization, and ongoing cruelty, (and the legislation of cruelty if we look at the numbers of states passing discriminatory laws. But, next Saturday, there will be only joy and voices raised in riotous celebration. Whether you were dressed as Cher, Tina Turner, or some colorful version of yourself with a crazy wig, love was in the air. This, too, is a Pentecostal moment where the Spirit is seen moving across many hearts and dancing in the streets. *Proud Mary keep on rolling...*

And isn't that what we as people on a journey, as people of faith seek to do as a church community of compassion and courage. To meet people where they are. To listen and understand.

Now the second parade of spirits I'll be attending is tomorrow's Memorial Day parade. I'll be there to honor my great uncle Bobby and other family and community members who have died while serving at war. I'll be there to honor those vets living today at the Edward Good House, in New the home for homeless vets that our church sponsored and helped to build. It is named after our Pastor Emeritus' David Good's father, Edward.

I'll be there to remember some of our dearest members of the Greatest Generation, like Sam Baez who died a few months ago. And I'll raise my voice, too, along with many others of you hoping and praying that someday our children and children's children will not need to study war anymore (as Isaiah 2:4 prophesied).

In that light, you may notice the artwork on today's bulletin is part of something called the World Peace Project. The artist, Harman, from Indonesia painted this tight-knit colorful world that sees the Pyramids, the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty as neighbors, and the fate of all civilizations becomes intertwined. The artist wrote that, “World peace is a human right, so we all have to try to make it happen in our own way,” the artist said.

"World peace is a human right..." As we sing and say our final prayers together today, may all languages, all voices be heard. May language be the source of good and unity for our world and May the Spirit move us to join in the parade of life where "everyone is filled!"