

Acts 2:14-24

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: “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.”

‘You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

2 Samuel 6:17-21

They brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being before the Lord. When David had finished offering the burnt-offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, ‘How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!’ David said to Michal, ‘It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord.

“Even Midwesterners Should Dance”

Rev. Rebecca McFee

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I’m feeling compelled today to tell you a little bit about Missouri. I’m from Missouri, and I know there are a few of you out there who are also from Missouri, and I found that when I started writing this sermon, there was far more that I wanted to tell you about Missouri than I ever realized. So I’ll keep it brief. My observation is that people from Missouri are a lot like guide dogs. We’re very dependable people, practical, we like to be useful. But like guide dogs, in some ways, we’ve kind of had our passion trained out of us. We may be artistic, and we may be romantic, but if we are, we keep that to ourselves. It’s just not something you tell people if you’re from Missouri.

Now, I've got to be exact about this. I'm actually from Northern Missouri, and so places like Branson may not really fully fit into the description that I'm about to give. Missouri is part of the heartland. We're part of the Midwest culture of our country. Sociologists have problems with actually defining the lines of what is a Midwesterner, but when you're there, you know it. My friends in Kansas, I have news for you. I'm sorry, but you're a lot more like people from Missouri than you care to believe. We are the Midwest, we are people from Iowa, Nebraska, from northern Dakota, we like to be practical. Yes, there are some of them in Minnesota, because Garrison Keillor tells truths, and he has built a career on well documenting the Midwesterners, especially those Lutherans from Minnesota. I have lived in Wisconsin. I would say that they're Midwesterners too, but they have this little problem that the cheese industry and the Packers have made them crazy.

But here's the truth as I know it, about being a Midwesterner. Baseball, the slowest sport in history, is our favorite sport. Sometimes we try to get excited about things, like hog prices, and about the rain, but usually we just decide to skip this because it's just too much trouble. We do have strong opinions about corn. You don't tell somebody from the Midwest that their sweet corn tastes like field corn. We are very practical, and we have a hard time with things that seem to be impractical, like ballet. For example, Suzanne Farrell, who is a ballerina of the 20th century, said that she had to leave the Midwest because, quote, "Ballet companies just did not exist in the Midwest." I believe that.

We are savers. We love our coupons. I love coupons. I love saving a dollar. We like to fold and save tinfoil. I still do that to this day. We find it fun. (congregation laughs.) Somebody else folds their tinfoil too, eh? We don't like to buy expensive clothes. We don't understand why somebody would buy a yacht. Every mother in Missouri will tell you, as they have told their kids, that passion gets you in trouble. Recent stories about California politicians will confirm this, and I can assure you that that has been passed on throughout Missouri this week. We find California beautiful, but we don't fully understand it, and neither do, probably, Californians understand the Midwest.

One of my favorite authors is Bill Bryson. He's from the Midwest, and he talks about Midwesterners all the time. He says this: "Directions are very important for Midwesterners. They have this innate need to be oriented, especially in their stories. A story related by a Midwesterner will at some point wander off into the thickets of interior monologue, along the lines of this - 'We were stayin' in a hotel about eight blocks northeast of the state capitol - come to think of it, I think it was northwest. Probably was more like nine blocks. And then this woman without any clothes on, naked as the day she was born, comes running to us from the - was it the southeast? or was it the southwest?'"

This is all true. He continues, "If there are two Midwesterners present, and they both witness the same incident, you can just about write off the whole story, because they'll spend the rest of the afternoon arguing the points of the compass, and they never will get back to the original story. You can always tell a Midwestern couple in Europe, because they'll be standing in the middle of a traffic isle in the middle of a busy intersection, looking at their windblown map, and arguing over which way is West. European cities,

with their wandering streets and undisciplined alleys, drive Midwesterners practically insane."

Well, I do need to mention a couple other things before we move on. From my state of Missouri, we're very proud that we don't have an accent. Yes, you may have an accent if you're from the South or Texas or Minnesota or Wisconsin, but for us, it's not just about not having an accent. We're proud that we don't even believe in them. It's just too much trouble to have a drawl or a brogue. We just talk. That's practical. On the same note, we don't like to call much attention to ourselves and therefore there aren't many of us who are famous. I tried to count. There are five famous people from Missouri. Since it's a short list, let me read it to you. Brad Pitt, Bob Barker, Harry S. Truman, which of the list he's the only one that stayed, and of the others, Walt Disney and Mark Twain.

Now I just want you to consider for a moment Walt Disney and his dilemma. Here he had this idea of building Disney. I don't know if he ever considered somewhere in Missouri, but I'm sure it didn't last long. Because the people of Missouri would have just looked at him and said, "You want to do what??" Because you see, people in Missouri just don't put mouse ears on just to have fun. And so where did he go? California, and then Florida, because that's where you know how to have fun. Mark Twain wasn't much different. He has a great town of Hannibal Missouri, if you've never been there I recommend it, but for him, and the arts and literature, off to Connecticut. This does, strangely, all lead us to the Scripture.

This is my point. King David was not from Missouri. We know this because his clothes were too fancy and he wrote poetry. He sang songs with a harp, and he had an accent. Wow. And here's his story. Here comes the Ark of the Covenant, and what happens? Off drop his clothes. He dances naked in front of God and everyone, and I can tell you, that doesn't happen in Missouri. Our Bibles don't even have this story in it. For the rest of us who are Midwesterners, this is a troubling passage. What, possibly, could be so wonderful to dare us to not notice that we had forgotten about our britches? And here King David celebrates as if this is okay, normal behavior. We would call it fanaticism. And yet, we have to note that the Ark of the Covenant was the sign, not a symbol, a sign of God's presence. It was a sense that the people had left God, though with the return of the Ark of the Covenant it was a celebration, that in the midst of a broken relationship comes reconciliation.

I do believe and profoundly proclaim that when we are in the midst of reconciliation, we do crazy stuff. We move beyond who we think we are, to celebrate, because reconciliation is one of the deepest acts of humanity. This is the season in which Christian season between Easter and Pentecost that we celebrate as the highest points of the year. It is a time in which we celebrate that Christ has come in resurrection, and here we continue the story that God is with us. The birds are singing at 5 a.m. We know that. They wake us up. But also we see the bikers out, and the children playing in the parks now. And should we dare to simply slide into thinking that summer is just something that we should assume, that it's just something that should happen, perhaps we need to be reminded of our story that indeed the gifts of God, even in the gifts of the season, come to

us as something that radically breaks us from who we are, even if we are from Missouri. Like a guide dog.

It reminds me of a dog that's so in his element that he jumps on the bed and insists to sprawl across it to have an afternoon nap. It challenges us to have a meal without using a coupon, and it tells us that in the midst of broken lives, God comes forth for us to celebrate. Think about this first preaching the sermon of Paul. Here he talks about crazy stuff, people who are going to have visions, and see things, and we would write them off. We're the first people to say this doesn't make sense. And yet it was in our country in the 1950s and the 1960s that this very passage becomes the highlight of what we would now call the civil rights movement. That they would see this as not a vision of someone else's of some crazy person in the Bible but it becomes a new dream of how America will be different and new and will celebrate equality.

Going back to guide dogs. As David said, we do get to celebrate watching guide dogs in our office, and it's a lot of fun. Jo Ann Belk and her family do this as a way to give back to the community. And like he said, sometimes they just don't graduate, and personally we celebrate that too because we see the dogs more. But you know, it's like that. Sometimes we don't graduate. Sometimes that's good. Sometimes we will change our ways and lick and play ball and bark again and jump on the bed. And so for just a minute, I want to share with you that I didn't always live in Missouri. After Missouri I've lived in five different states. When I left Missouri, of all places, I went to Louisiana. What a crazy place. It taught me so much, because I had never seen people be able to have so much fun. For a girl from Missouri, that was a wonderful thing. They taught me to dance and to eat, and my taste buds tasted things they'd never tasted before. I learned that sometimes, you could actually leave work an hour early to go eat crawfish. You could do your work later that night, maybe tomorrow. And despite a political system that to me defies gravity, it is a place that can teach us to have a lot of joy.

We all have been in sorrow over Katrina. We've all been in sorrow over all that has been lost. And yet for me their passion for life will be that which will heal their land. If only we could rebuild their coastline and they could teach us how to cook, it would all be a better place. Just the other day I was watching the TV and I didn't recognize the actress, so I don't know who it was, but an actress was talking about her roots, growing up as a Southern Louisiana Catholic and she said, "You know, I always knew we were a special breed. We understood that if God gave you a gift, you didn't look a gift horse in the mouth, but you celebrated every day, because that's the gift God has given you." That's what I took from my experience of college in Louisiana.

Four years later, I found myself at Duke in a highlight of some of the best years of basketball there, where I literally could pass on the sidewalks names like Lakener, Hurley, Hill, Cherokee Parks. I did actually watch a dance much like David's after an NCAA tournament. For me, going to Duke was simply jumping through a hoop of where I needed to get to, and what I realized was that I would be profoundly surprised by the passion that God gave to me through even reading things such as dry German theology. I couldn't read enough, I couldn't study enough, I couldn't get enough of every thing that

they put before me, and it surprised me. To top it off, that's where I met my husband Daniel, who overwhelmed my vision again, and even to this day we celebrate the same passions of theology and basketball. Well, sometimes you aren't always a guide dog. Sometimes you jump on the bed and make it messy, and sometimes you have a good time, and sometimes that's the real gift of God.

There's a classic book in theology called *The Discipline of Celebration* by Richard Foster, and he says that celebration is central to all of our spiritual disciplines. We may be able to start tennis lessons or piano lessons by a dint of will, he says, but we will not keep it for long without joy. It's what sustains all novices. And here's the paradox. The truth is, yes, everyone can be passionate, whether you're from Missouri, Louisiana, or North Carolina. For me, today, I'm still a Midwesterner. I love saving two dollars. I still fold my tinfoil. There will be plenty of material for my boys as they grow up, and I know that. I love my roots, I love the devotion to community and to hard work and to the land and the reading that Midwesterners bring, but I also love the joy of when Duke is playing or when they win. I love the thought of Louisiana cooking. And you know, I love being here, where the mountains call to you sometimes, where you see the people out riding their bikes. Where you celebrate all that God has given to us and nature here, and the celebrations that let us know that God always gives us a gift of joy.

There are those days. Just the other day when the postmaster said that we could put food out on our curb, and they would take it, and our kids got together in those small little moments when we celebrate that we all are a community together. When we see a note from the school that asks us to give money to one of the children of the school who has cancer. And when we indeed pass on to our children to save our resources, even tinfoil. It is the time, it's the post-Easter chatter where we talk about things like new life and resurrection, and we talk about butterflies and flowers, but it's really about living it. Resurrection will come when a guide dog is given to someone, and their life will break open for they will be able to go places they never could before. And resurrection will come when we are hard workers, when it pays off and we get into the college we wanted or we get the raise or simply we know we did a job well done.

And other times, resurrection comes when we simply kick back and enjoy the white water rafting trip, when we celebrate the friend's birthday, when we're there for somebody, children or a partner. It can be the love of medicine, the love of law. It can be the love of education, the cause, the candidate, the opportunity, the one in need. The truth is that there's passion in the guide dog, and even those of us from Missouri. It's just how you define it. And this I know, it is a gift. It's God-given. It's in the details, and it's in the grand universe that always invites us for a big celebration. Be surprised. Dance. That's what resurrection is. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.