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There is something peculiar about human fascination with violence. We've all seen this on the road, if we perchance pass an accident on the shoulder or in the ditch....everybody is rubber-necking and swerving all over the place. And as if we don't see enough violence on TV or in the movies, we seek it out on YouTube and share weird tidbits on Facebook.

I'm not too proud to admit to you that on one occasion even I was unable to tear my face away from this short film on YouTube that Doug and I were watching one day...it was about failed stupid human stunts...it was nothing more than attempt after attempt of people jumping off of buildings or playing with fire or taunting irate animals. About every 2-3 minutes, I would say, "Ok, this is

horrible, I'm done watching!" and of course I watched the whole thing, however long it was, at least half an hour.

But humans are quirky, aren't we? While we can't seem to tear ourselves away from violence, we are, at the same time, so very weary of it.

Yes, you are likely thinking, but what in the world does this have to do with today, when we celebrate confirmation, a day when we gather in this lovely old church, a day when we enjoy a picnic together and games—and all this on Pentecost, the very birthday of the church? Today is quite lovely, in fact, so why bring up the topic of violence?

I bring it up, because the story of Pentecost is a violent story. We don't often pay attention to that side of Pentecost, but it's there, see for yourselves. When the story begins, the disciples are huddled together in a locked room for

fear of their lives because they have followed Jesus and believed him to be the Son of God. Suddenly a wind from heaven blasts the doors open...this is not just a gentle breeze, mind you...this is a noisy, rushing, violent wind from heaven...in Iowa, we call this a tornado....

And then God rains down fire on their heads, branding them as children of the living God, filling them with this rushing, blowing Spirit, and they start speaking in languages they themselves don't understand, and the crowds clamor to see and hear what's going on, what with the violent wind and the tongues of fire that burns but does not consume and the babbling disciples...and there is chaos and confusion and people are afraid and perplexed and there is nearly a riot and this is no ordinary day.

And then Peter stands up and shouts over the chaos, quoting the prophet Joel, one of the scariest of the prophets, to be sure, and his quote isn't sweet like a nursery rhyme, Peter does not sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" to soothe the agitated crowds...no, he instead chooses imagery from the apocalypse, borrowing Joel's vision for the end of the world, a time when God's kingdom cracks open like an egg and it's not a sweet furry little chick that pops out, but blood and fire and smoky mist.

I'm willing to bet *that* Pentecost wasn't celebrated with a confirmation with pretty carnations and a cake or a church picnic with lemonade and hot dogs....not that there is anything *wrong* with those things...in fact, quite the opposite, there is plenty *right* with those things...it is indeed right and salutary that we should at times put aside the violence that seems to rule this world and participate in a sack

race...and drink a cup of red punch...and sit under a tree and eat a bag of chips
and watch the kids play.

We read the fascinating story of Pentecost today and it is not just a story,
but it is *our* story, we who also live lives marked by whirlwinds and confusion and
rushing and spinning and spiraling and riotous fear...we get what it means to live
with weird dreams and panic about what the future holds...we're right there in
that crowd in Jerusalem, wondering *what in the world is going on in the world and
with our lives*...yes, this is our Pentecost story, but this is also only part of it...it's
not the entire story...it's not the *after*...

Because there is always an *after*. The curtain always falls. The inhaled
breath is always exhaled. Eventually, the violence subsides. And the wind dies
down. And the fire burns out. The gushing blood clots. The smoky mist dissipates.

The babbling falls silent. The trembling settles. The pounding fist unclenches. The sun rises. There is a new day. An *after*.

There is a remembrance we all carry of what can be, a distant memory of a time when there was peace. I am not talking merely about sentimentalized nostalgia, but rather an ancient echo of a time in the garden when we walked with God, a time when the evening breeze in Eden was not violent, when human blood had not yet been spilled upon the earth, a time when we had no idea what it meant to be afraid of the dark, a time when fear did not consume, a time when we did no violence to ourselves, to each other, or to the world.

We all hold, deep in the furthest recesses of our souls, the flickering of hope that will not die...it's why we humans are still around, it's why we still have babies and plant trees. And that hope doesn't lie only in human achievement,

although in part it might, but it lies in something beyond ourselves, something outside of ourselves, and we call that God. And that hope goes beyond our desire to restore this creation to its former glory, but rather that God will make it even better than it was before because he has promised us he will, and we call that heaven. Yes, there is a shattering and a scattering, but there is also a gluing back together, and we call that redemption.

Yes, there is Pentecost, with all its bizarre and peculiar violence and drama and this is what the church is born from—a stirring, a restlessness. We are rooted in a Spirit that agitates us, sends us out when we want to stay home, makes us go places we’d rather avoid and makes us look at people we’d rather ignore. But this is life and it is messy and God gets that and sticks with us through it all, through our own brand of violence, through our own methods of defiance, through our

own times of blood and fire and smoky mist. God is there in the before, in the during, and in the after. Alpha. And Omega.

God remains with us when the dust settles, when we collapse, panting and exhausted, God is with us in the battle when weapons clash, but God is with us also in the *after*...in small glimpses of that after like when you walk past a house on a summer evening and hear a kid inside practicing the flute. There is always an *after*, and that after isn't some distant day in a thousand years. That *after* began when Jesus rose from his violent death, so that one day words like violence would become extinct in human speech . If that weird Pentecost took place on a Monday, God would still be around on Tuesday.

Welcome to the *after*.