



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Haven Godwin Parrott, Guest Preacher

JUNE 4, 2017
PENTECOST ❖ FOUNDERS DAY

Acts Two on Sunset Avenue
Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-21

It is a great honor and a real treat to be here with you today, to be a part of the celebration of this faith community which has been—for over sixty years—such an effective witness to and conduit for the re-creating, reconciling, resurrecting work of God’s Spirit.

I wish I could tell you something—*anything*—about the Godwin years at Lakeside, something that I haven’t read about or been told about, something I actually remember for myself about that exciting first decade when my daddy was the pastor here . . . but I can’t. I really don’t remember a thing. To be completely honest, I don’t even remember ever *being* here because I was four years old when my parents loaded up the family and moved us away, to Oxford Baptist Church.

The only memories I have of Rocky Mount, of Lakeside, are the ones given to me by my parents, my brothers, and my parents’ friends like beloved Presbyterian minister Jim McChesney and his wife, Carolyn, who recalled the same two stories of me every single time they saw me, whether it was at the K&W in Raleigh where they’d meet up with my parents to eat before going to a concert together, whether they were visiting my parents at our home in Oxford, or whether I was visiting them in their later years in Tarboro. It was always the same two stories, stories which have proven to be accurate summaries of my spiritual life.

Jim always told of the sight of me as a little bitty girl with long golden curls, running down the sidewalk to meet daddy as he returned from his job at the church. He said Daddy held his arms out wide as I approached, then scooped me up and twirled me around and around and around till we were both dizzy. That memory is a snapshot of pure grace—my daddy was the embodiment of grace—and it seems I’ve spent my life running towards the open-armed grace that has always held, dizzied and delighted me.

Carolyn always told of a time she and mama were having coffee together at our house, of mama telling me I could play outside but, for safety’s sake, I was not to go into the front yard. Well, “Do NOT go into the front yard”

is, of course, an invitation to go into the front yard. It wasn't long, Carolyn said, before she and mama looked out the window and saw me tiptoeing by on my way to the front yard, hands covering my face. I guess I figured if I couldn't see them, they couldn't see me. Carolyn's memory would prove prophetic: I plead guilty to many instances of hiding from my mama and thinking I was getting away with something, as well as instances of trying to hide my true self in plain sight, thinking others couldn't see.

I guess you could say Daddy was grace, and mama was law. Except what I eventually discovered is, if Bettie Godwin represents law, then truly, all is grace.

What I know about Lakeside I know from the *Window on the World* history book, from my parent's and brothers' recollections, from the legendary Gaylord Lehman's gracious pastoral care to my family near the end of my father's life and his eloquence at daddy's funeral, from the delightful privilege of working with the amazing Elizabeth Edwards on a couple of women's events, and from reading *The Link* and Jody's sermons over the years.

My mother loved this church, and she loved Jody Wright. Though she left Lakeside in her early 40s, Lakeside never left her. She carried this church in her heart and in her prayers every day of her next 50 years, until her very last days, and she did everything she could to ensure I knew what a special community it was, and is.

Mama lived in my home for the last 11 years of her life. Our routine after dinner was to watch *Jeopardy!* and, during the commercials, she would mute the TV and we would read *The Link* and then, the transcript of Jody's latest sermon. It became such a ritual that to this day, when I hear Alex Trebek's voice, I think of Jody Wright. After mama's death I discovered a box under her desk—a box I'd never seen before. It was labeled "for Haven"—and inside were all the copies of Jody's sermons she'd saved, indexed by scripture reference. The only other preacher's sermons my mama so painstakingly filed were my daddy's.

So . . . all this to say that what I remember of my story starts in Oxford, yet I am keenly aware that my story starts way before my ability to remember. It's a story that includes people with last names like Hayworth, Pitt, Gurganus, Battle, Henry . . . names that were ping-ponged around my family's dinner table for all of my growing up years. My brothers and parents would tell

stories involving those names and then look at me and say, “Don’t you remember?”

“Um, no, y’all, I don’t. I wasn’t born yet.”

Eventually I quit reminding them I didn’t remember and nodded my head and acted like I did because I could tell that those names were about the memories of a rich quality of life and relationship with those people in this Christian community. Those names represented the energy and hope, the breath and blaze of it all. Those names meant so much to them that they wanted those names to mean something to me. And you know what? They did. The people I came to know through other people’s memories *have* become dear to me, have connected me to the story of how, in 1955 AD, a group of people responded to the wind of the Spirit by raising their sails rather than their objections, allowing themselves to be blown away to the western edge of town, where—ablaze with energy—they worked to create a space that would house and herald God’s grace to and for all, a community which would value inquiry and welcome variety of theological thought and spiritual experience, a hands-and-feet-of-Christ community which would work tirelessly and give generously to serve the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of the people of Rocky Mount.

It’s a story with echoes from Pentecost in Jerusalem circa 33 AD, a reverberation of Acts Two—on Sunset Avenue. And not only in 1955, but as Lakeside’s way throughout its history—a perpetual Pentecost, if you will.

Somehow the Christ-following community founded and forged here has steadily resisted the all too common mistake made throughout the history of the institutionalized church, a mistake at the root of in-Jesus’-name division and competition; i.e., the mistake of attempting to bottle and cork according to human will the wild and restless Spirit which so obviously blows as God wills.

Fr. Richard Rohr says it this way: “Catholicism replicated almost down to fine detail the ritual and legalistic mistakes of Judaism, and Protestantism has imitated us (Catholics) quite well, while trying to cover their tracks by just getting legalistic about very different issues.” (*The Divine Dance*, p. 89)

If the stories in the Bible tell us anything at all about God it is that there is no institutionalizing the Infinite, no domesticating the Divine, no controlling how, when, and on whom the Holy will work

The Old Testament reading Elizabeth offered earlier in this service is great example. Numbers 11:24-30 records how God puts God's Spirit on some of the elders who have gathered around the Tent of Meeting as a way of empowering them to help Moses take care of the people. There were two other guys, Medad and Eldad, who did not gather with the others at the tent, but on whom the Divine Spirit also chose to rest. When Medad and Eldad begin to prophesy in the camp, Joshua objects, presumably because he's certain the Spirit couldn't have rested on Medad and Eldad since they weren't present at the Tent of Meeting when the Spirit rested on the others. So Joshua tells Moses he needs to stop these guys from doing what the Divine empowered them to do, and Moses is all like, "Dude! *Really?* I wish the Lord would put his Spirit on all of them! We need all the help we can get!"

Pentecost is a fulfillment of Moses' wish, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29) Or as Peter says, quoting Joel, "And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind.'" (Acts 2:17)

Acts Two on Sunset Avenue is one among countless installations in the grand story of God's dream of birthing a body for God's self, a dream God's been waking people up to since the beginning, when the Spirit hovered over the deep and energized the birth of a material, visible riot of expression of the Divine nature. Creation was—is—God's first body. Then the Spirit hovered over Mary and brought forth the body of God-with-us, God-as-one-of-us, the incarnational assurance of God-for-all-of-us. Then, at Pentecost, the Spirit unleashed God-on-us, giving birth to yet another display of the body of God, the Body of Christ: eternal in scope and cosmic in proportion, and revealing that salvation is a community project in which we find the most searing challenges as well as the deepest blessings, a shared journey into which we are invited and inspired not so much for the purpose of fixing each other as for participating in one another's healing, and by extension, the healing of the world.

Lakeside's way over the past 62 years has not been to bottle and cork, but to loose the Spirit's flow. I am confident that Lakeside's history of perpetual Pentecost will also be the reality of her future. May the words of Jan Richardson's "Blessing for Pentecost Day" bring both comfort and challenge in and for the work of community that awaits.

This Grace That Scorches Us

Here's one thing
you must understand
about this blessing:
it is not
for you alone.
It is stubborn
about this.
Do not even try
to lay hold of it
if you are by yourself,
thinking you can carry it
on your own.
To bear this blessing,
you must first take yourself
to a place where everyone
does not look like you
or think like you,
a place where they do not
believe precisely as you believe,
where their thoughts
and ideas and gestures
are not exact echoes
of your own.
Bring your sorrow.
Bring your grief.
Bring your fear.
Bring your weariness,
your pain,
your disgust at how broken
the world is,
how fractured,
how fragmented
by its fighting,
its wars,
its hungers,
its penchant for power,
its ceaseless repetition
of the history it refuses

to rise above.
I will not tell you
this blessing will fix all that.
But in the place
where you have gathered,
wait.
Watch.
Listen.
Lay aside your inability
to be surprised,
your resistance to what you
do not understand.
See then whether this blessing
turns to flame on your tongue,
sets you to speaking
what you cannot fathom
or opens your ear
to a language
beyond your imagining
that comes as a knowing
in your bones,
a clarity
in your heart
that tells you
this is the reason
we were made:
for this ache
that finally opens us,
for this struggle,
this grace
that scorches us
toward one another
and into
the blazing day.

—Jan Richardson
from *Circle of Grace: A Book of
Blessings for the Seasons*

June 4, 2017

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Desiring to know us better and hoping that we will want to want to know you in return, you have come to each of us in ways that we can best understand. As Parent, you create and nurture us, loving us as only a mother or father can, growing us into the person you created us to be. As Son, you come as one of us, sharing our life, experiencing our joys, struggling through our sorrows. You know us as well as we know ourselves and love us still. As Spirit, you remain with us as a wise friend who knows the path we are walking and can guide us to choose wisely as we journey along. And there are other uniquely personal ways that you relate to us. For loving us enough to desire our love in return, we thank you, O God.

We are grateful today for the gifts you have given to your people, especially the gift of the Spirit which enlightens and energizes us. We thank you for the gift of the Church which has shared your Good News person by person and generation by generation so that today we can rejoice in the new life offered by Jesus Christ just as the earliest disciples did so long ago.

In particular, we thank you, O God, for the gift of Lakeside to our lives and this community. We thank you for the women and men and children who first formed this fellowship and for everyone through the years who has participated in its mission and ministry. We are grateful for lives transformed, joys shared, and sorrows comforted. We are thankful for what this congregation has meant to your world.

We pray that you will continue to work in and through us to share your love, O God. Keep us grounded by our ministry in the past, but direct our energies to the work we have yet to do. Open our hearts and our minds to fresh ways in which we can bring your ways to bear in the lives of people around us.

For today, bless our celebration, but also hear our prayers for friends who are in need. With weary and broken hearts, we add to our prayers the people of Kabul and Manila and London. There is enough hardship in our world without hatred doing more destruction, so help us, O God, overcome hate with love and cruelty with compassion so that the pain which rips through our lives day by day might cease forever.

Breathe your Spirit over us again and excite and empower us to continue your work in the world. Take our hearts and set them on fire, O God, through the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jody C. Wright
Senior Minister