This is what I wrote yesterday afternoon.

I’m sitting on our back porch. A mockingbird is singing his little head off in the neighbor’s tree. The sky above is at once unremarkable—thoroughly typical for this time of year, light blue with a blanket of white clouds rubbed thin in places—and *entirely* remarkable, this blue and white tapestry over oak, fig, and palm trees and homes faced with native stone.

The hum of air conditioning units all around. Everything is greener and brighter in the aftermath of last night’s rain.

Is this scene any less evidence of the Spirit than tongues of fire, a rush of violent wind?

There *were* no tongues of fire, I think—at least not in my imagination of that Day of Pentecost. A sound “*like* the rush of a violent wind”? Why not? All of them filled with the Holy Spirit? No doubt—at least in my imagination. A babble of voices out of which each one heard their own language? Sure! It’s as good a description as any, I think—and better than many others, I’m sure.

Luke, writing in Acts, is trying to record and convey something of great moment for those Jews who had gathered wherever they had gathered.

[There’s that mockingbird again.]

He’s doing his best to describe the indescribable. Full stop.

Other onlookers had their own take on the scene (and there must have been a scene): “Oh, they’re drunk!” Sounds like at least as reasonable an explanation or description as “There are tongues of fire on their heads!”

And, frankly, Peter must not have known too much about drinking and drunks if his best rebuttal was, “They can’t be drunk! It’s nine o’clock in the morning!” Though it’s been over 30 years since I’ve had a drink, I’m pretty sure *I* was drunk at nine in the morning on at least one occasion.

Regardless of drink or no drink, Peter wanted to set the record straight. Think what you will, he implies, but here’s what’s really going on right now in front of your eyes: This is evidence of God’s Spirit being poured out on God’s people—*all* of God’s people. You ain’t seen nothin’ yet. There will be prophecies and visions and dreams. There will be fire, smoky mists, eclipses, blood moons, and more.

He goes on to say (in my imagination) that *you*—who would explain what’s happening now by saying that we’re a bunch of drunks–will call all those things by the names I’ve just given them, natural phenomena. But for us, who believe, they are and will be *portents*, signs of the power and majesty of God who created all of us, including all of you as well. For there is no “us” and “you” in God’s creation. Only *us*, all of us, created by a loving God.

Peter’s words echo those of the psalmist—also at a loss—who claims that all the creatures of the earth and sky and sea, including sea monsters, are evidence of God’s creative power. God’s Spirit has created us all.

Paul tells us not to be afraid, just as the angels and Jesus himself had said repeatedly. It’s okay, Paul tells the Romans, even the sea monsters, because we’re all God’s children, watched over by the same Spirit of God.

Prior to the events on the Day of Pentecost Jesus told whoever would listen that it was not all over just because he was leaving them, because he died a human death. Within the miraculous story of the resurrection he told them, “It’s *not* all over. We’re sending you—we’re coming to you as—one who will be with you wherever you may be, however afraid you may feel. Someone who will be on your side (your Advocate) in all things—tsunamis, earthquakes, school shootings, floods, human trafficking, and all the rest. Your advocate will be with you as you confront challenges and horrors, both natural phenomena and human-crafted tragedies. The Holy Spirit will enlighten your hearts and minds, to help you reverse the destruction wrought by humans (through all means, politics and laws included) and to help protect you (along with your scientific work) against naturally occurring disasters. And the Holy Spirit will be your comfort in the midst of all those as you make strides to overcome them.

It's cold comfort (or worse, much worse) to tell victims of senseless crimes and other tragedies, “God is with you.” But we who believe can hold that promise in our hearts for them. (I don’t like the sound of that exactly, but like Peter and the psalmist, I often find myself at a loss of adequate words.)

So here I sit, still, on my back porch—now with sounds of vehicles in the distance, a dove in one of our oak trees, the neighbor’s lawn mower, and the perfume of just-cut grass. The sky now reflects more blue, fewer clouds, and a light breeze blows all around me, through the trees in our yard.

There are no tongues of fire, no *rushing* wind, but somehow in this still, quiet moment, by God’s grace, I’m aware of that same Holy Spirit moving all around me, within me.

Within all of us here, now, in this moment.

+ + +