

“Practicing Pentecost: After the Down Payment”

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“Holy Spirit is the deposit, the down payment on our inheritance.”

Ephesians 1:3-14

When Juli and I bought our place in Sequim in 2013, we were first time buyers and in need of guidance as we entered the world of home ownership. Once we located something we liked and thought we could afford, our realtor told us we would need “earnest money,” which we later learned wasn’t so much a special kind of money but an indication of certain kind of people. Earnest money is jointly held once there is equal earnestness between the seller and the buyer, two parties holding something of value in trust or in escrow. Earnest money is “good faith” money and is a signal that two parties have skin in the game. This is what today’s reading from *The Letter to the Ephesians* is suggesting, I think. Holy Spirit is earnest about us and our world, divine earnestness looking for human earnestness to be held jointly in trust. And this earnestness, this eagerness informs our practice of Pentecost. And our inheritance is not merely something off in the distant future, as if we are getting ready to live off some heavenly endowment. Our inheritance is an invitation to fully participate in the here and now, with Jesus, our Brother, Savior and Friend, “God’s skin in the game,” to put it crudely, looking for your skin and mine. Oh, that we would be as earnest as God is earnest.

To practice Pentecost after the down payment is to tap into the presence and power of Holy Spirit taking residence in our lives, our world, our successes and failures, our work and leisure. There is enough presence and power already set loose to enable us to participate with eagerness. There is enough earnest money in circulation, which is a good thing because our eagerness to stay in the game waxes and wanes. That is why we practice Pentecost.

Months ago I introduced you to the writer and film-maker Jim Henderson, who wrote a book and documentary about a rabbi, a preacher and as imam (Muslim cleric) in Peoria, Illinois, of all places. He called them the “Peoria Three.” And after working with Daniel, Jim and Kamil, Henderson came to believe that if we could replicate their earnestness, well, we could rediscover health and wellbeing in every relationship held in trust. Henderson witnessed these three practicing three practices. The first one is the practice of **being unusually interested in others**. After the down payment, especially long after the down payment, staying unusually interested in what first captured our attention is what I want to call the first wave of staying power. You see, the longer we stay at something, we begin to see wonderful complexity, nuances and texture, and the beauty and challenges of diversity, throughout the human family and all of nature. Staying interested will eventually give us reason to practice **staying in the room with difference**. This, too, takes great intention, and is the second wave of staying power. To stay in the room particularly with difference and over the long haul, we must be intentional about sharing the lead and lightening each other’s load. Like geese flying in formation, it is best we rotate front to back and side to side, lest we become overwhelmed by complexity and fall utterly exhausted.

But with adequate staying power, after the beginning of something worth beginning, a powerful willingness can emerge. The rabbi, pastor and imam found a willingness to **stop the destructive practice of comparing one’s best to other people’s worst**, which may be the single most powerful and necessary wave of staying power. Staying power. There is enough power and presence from Holy Spirit’s down payment on us and our world. There is enough earnestness, still, for us to tap into and hold things together in trust. Will we? Will you? Will I?

But, you say, but what if all this is too optimistic, too Polly Anna, too much preacher speak? What, you may be thinking, what if I'm not sure I'm eager or earnest about anything anymore? Dare we be that honest in here?

I don't know what channels you monitor while driving, but one of our favorites is channel 70. And for whatever reason, Rupert Holmes is a regular on channel 70. His signature "Escape" comes on at least three times a day, which may be telling us something. It is a song about the tension that is created when staying doesn't feel as good as thinking about leaving. Any of you ready to escape? But you know, even tired, worn-out relationships, years after the initial down payment, may be worth a new down payment on something new.

A terribly bored wife places this ad:

"If you like Pina Coladas, and getting caught in the rain. If you're not into yoga, if you have half a brain. If you like making love at midnight, in the dunes of the cape. I'm the love that you've looked for, write to me, and escape." And when the husband of the anonymous writer replies to the ad, it is revealed that he was thinking about leaving, too. And, so, he writes back – "Meet me at O'Malley's, where we'll plan our escape." The anonymous husband arrives first, with high hopes. "But when she walks into the place he knew her smile in an instant...the curve of her face. "Oh, it's you," they say, "I guess we never knew."

You see, neither one knew that the other one "liked Pina Coladas, or getting caught in the rain, the feel of the ocean, and the taste of champagne." They had forgotten about "making love at midnight, in the dunes of the cape." And yet, and yet, that night at O'Malley's bar, well, they were moved to make a new down payment, earnest money with renewed earnestness, a new future that would be held in trust.

I'll end with a story I read earlier in the week, written by Bryan Wiggins, a novelist who lives in Maine, a story that appeared in an email thread I received that was originated by Glenn Wiggins. By the way, Bryan is Glenn's nephew. The story involves a Pastor Tom, a local church pastor, who is giving a children's sermon. He has a children's bible on his lap, having just finished reading the story of Jesus asleep in a boat during a storm, who wakes up to hear his disciples in a panic just in time to shout – "Peace, be still!"

"Pastor Tom asked the children what the story meant, and before he could call on any of the kids who'd raised their waving hands—wouldn't you know it—Little Miss Smarty-Pants, Tina Decker, just blurted out an answer. 'It's a story about faith, she said. 'It tells us to believe in something, like God, even if we can't see him.'"

After the children are released to head up to Mrs. Prichard's Sunday School room to discuss and draw the story, Wiggins has one of the children offer this incredible insight:

"Maybe Tina had gotten it wrong. Maybe faith isn't believing in something you cannot see. Maybe it is believing in something you can see and know all too well—but believing instead that it can be something different than what you think it is. Maybe it is like believing simple drawings on a simple piece of paper can be the sparkling scene of the wind and waves of a storm. And just maybe...the same is true of people. Maybe we can have faith that there is more to them than we think, as well." Beautiful.

This is the kind of believing that comes after the down payment, which is nothing less than Holy Spirit investing in our broken and mended, frustrating and beautiful lives and world. Staying presence and power is not only what we need. It is what we have. Amen.