

70th ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE METHODIST TRADITION

Blown Away

Acts 2:1-21

Can you imagine this scene from scripture? “They were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1). They were processing everything that had happened: Jesus’ death at the hands of the Romans, his resurrection three days later, his many appearances after he died and rose again, and his sudden ascent into heaven. And now, they are gathered together, the text reads... trying to decipher his cryptic instructions: “Do not leave Jerusalem!” (Acts 1:4). That’s not so hard. Although the disciples might have considered fleeing Jerusalem, the place where Jesus was arrested and hanged on a cross, and Roman persecution. The instructions continued: “Wait for the gift my FATHER promised, which you have heard me speak about” (Acts 1:4 NIV). Gift? What gift? There is no gift here. Then, there’s this: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5, NIV). What is that supposed to mean?

“Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. They saw individual flames of fire alighting on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak” (Acts 2:2-4 CEB). Now that had to be a sight! They must have been blown away! Jesus sent the Holy Spirit in such an impressive way on that Day of Pentecost, but we forget that the Holy Spirit was already there.



As a member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit was, is, and always will be present. We know this because we know the Holy Spirit was present at creation: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-3 NRSV). The Hebrew here is *ruach*, which means *spirit* or *wind*. It is like the wind that swept through the room on the first Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was, is, and will always be present. This crazy event on Pentecost was just a reminder. Because every now and then, we all need that reminder, even those who were in direct ministry with Jesus. In 1956, when the Methodist Church approved full clergy rights for women, it was not the beginning of women’s ministry; it was the

recognition of what the Holy Spirit had already been doing. Women had already been preaching, teaching, organizing, leading revivals, founding schools and hospitals, and serving as missionaries. But in that moment, the church formally said, “Yes! The Spirit’s call on women is real. And we will no longer deny it.”

Since that day, thousands of women have answered God’s call to ordained ministry. Today, women serve as pastors of small rural congregations and tall steeple churches. They serve as district superintendents and conference leaders. They are seminary professors, chaplains, missionaries, church planters, and theologians. Women now make up a significant and growing portion of ordained elders and deacons in our denomination.

In 1980, just twenty-four years after women received full clergy rights, the church elected its first female bishop, Marjorie Matthews. Since then, dozens of women have been elected to the episcopacy, serving across the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, proclaiming the gospel, appointing clergy, casting visions, and shepherding the church. Women clergy have led congregations through cultural upheaval, denominational conflict, natural disasters, and global pandemics. They have baptized babies and buried saints.

They have preached prophetic sermons for justice, started food pantries and recovery ministries, planted new churches, revitalized struggling ones, and walked faithfully beside the grieving and the seeking.

Best of all, and what we should be proudest of, are not simply the milestones. It is the faithfulness. Women called into ministry in The United Methodist Church have loved God and loved their neighbors, continually and faithfully. They did not give up, even when appointments were limited, and pay was unequal. Even when congregations resisted. Even when doors were slow to open. They continued to reach out in love.

That is what the Jesus-followers did. They did not give up. When all seemed lost, they recognized the Holy Spirit in one another, and they kept going. A little bit after Pentecost in the book of Acts, the scripture says:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47 NIV).

This is what I expect the future holds. No matter what, we will continue meeting together. We will continue to love God through worship and study. We will continue to love our neighbors through all we do. We will continue to be the clergy and faithful people who have blown everyone away. Episcopacy, serving

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Written by Rev. Lisa Straus, Senior Pastor, Tarrytown UMC, Austin, Texas