

“Crackpots”
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Acts 2:1-21

We’ve all heard the word, and have probably used it, or had it applied to us, and it’s never meant nicely. Crackpot. We ascribe this label to people who don’t quite fit the mold, people who view the world in radically different ways, like conspiracy theorists, who see hidden sinister forces everywhere, like the Illuminati or the Bilderberg Group or the Masons, or aliens. More recently, it’s been the “deep-state” that’s blamed for all our troubles. Each of these conspiracy theories are devoted to revealing how sinister forces are deceiving and manipulating people to gain the power to take control. Ironically, some of the conspiracy theories are actually designed to do the exact same thing.

For all we know, maybe some of those claims are partially true, but what these people share, in their own divergent way, is a desire to impose order on insensible chaos. There must be some deeper concealed plot at play that, if exposed, would unlock the mystery and make sense of it all.

At the heart of every crackpot is a hunger, an emptiness longing to be filled, and if you are a crackpot, someone who sees things from an unusual angle, none of what I’m saying is meant to demean or condemn you, because the world is full of crackpots, hoping to be filled. It’s just that most people tend to seek other materials, like possessions or wealth or ideology or being important or always being right, to stuff up that hole so that they can feel whole. Of course, those methods are futile. You can toss whatever worldly thing you like into your emptiness. It will vanish in an instant, consumed like a black hole that eats light, and few if any of us are immune.

In fact, for the crackpots among us, among whom I include myself, we find ourselves in some very exalted company. Although he doesn't use the word "crackpot," Lloyd John Ogilvie's inspiring book, Drumbeat of Love: The Unlimited Power of the Spirit as Revealed in the Book of Acts," tells us, "The Apostles more than met this qualification as they waited in the Upper Room during the ten-day interval between Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost. Emptiness? They felt it with devastating insufficiency. They had experienced a life of high adventure with Jesus. But now as they waited despairingly for the fulfillment of his promise and power, the words of hope seemed to mock their impotence and inadequacy. It's a terrible thing to have a passion with no power to live it." [p. 23]

That's where the disciples were. Gathered together, like we are today, keeping the faith as best as they could, as we do, but the interval had now stretched out for ten days, three times longer than between crucifixion and resurrection, and Jesus had given them no timetable, no due date for the Spirit's arrival. Sitting there, the thought must have crept into their minds, "It could be tomorrow. It could be next year," and until it happened, they were powerless to do anything.

I think anyone with the slightest scintilla of self-knowledge can resonate with that reality. As Ogilvie wrote, "We've all known it: a challenge to love when we have little capacity for it, a need to forgive others when we can't even forgive ourselves, a longing for wisdom and knowledge for life's demands when we can't figure out what to do with today, the unsettling needs of people when we have neither faith nor hope to believe that healing can take place." [p.24]

Into this bottomless divot, God came rushing in like a tornado or a hurricane with a violent wind. In the Apostles' hollow room, excitement and terror filled their hearts in equal measure, and I imagine if they were standing up, that mighty wind knocked them down. This

wind was the very same breath of God that moved over the face of the deeps at the beginning of creation; the breath that animated humanity and brought life back to the dry bones in the valley of Ezekiel's vision. This is the same whirlwind that led and protected the people of Exodus in their march from slavery, the very same whirlwind that answered Job in his desperate confusion. But the crush of life-giving air was just the prelude.

Flame came down, separated and descended on the Apostles, and like the burning bush it did not consume, but consecrated them. This was the same as the fire of the pillar that lit the way and guided the Israelites in their wilderness journey, and a new way opened for the disciples. Moved by these obvious signs of God's presence, they unbarred the door and left that little room and entered a spacious courtyard outside, where people from far and near had gathered to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost, honoring both the harvest and the Law given by God to Moses – a dual festival celebrating the physical and spiritual nourishment only God can provide.

All these people hungry for consolation, burning for inspiration, but an obstacle stood in the way. Each and every one descended from the arrogant people who built the Tower of Babel. Their ancestors assumed they could reach God on their own terms through their own means, so God divided the people, separated them by mutually unintelligible languages that prevented communication, and construction on that Tower stopped. This inheritance meant that, even in their unity around the festival of Pentecost, those gathered there could not fully commune with one another in their joy over God.

Yet the disciples had a story to share, one like none other, so mouths opened and lungs poured forth air and tongues moved, and words emerged in every language, a unifying cacophony that empowered everyone present to hear with astonishment the wonders and wisdom

and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The story flowed, praising God for the resurrection, and many hearts caught on fire with a new hope for a new life where the constant quest to fill the void might finally end. Some disregarded the words as nonsense. They confused the disciples with naughty Episcopalians and accused the disciples of being drunk, despite the very early hour. Today, we might simply dismiss them as crackpots. And in a way, crackpots are what the disciples were, what they needed to be to receive the power to fulfill their mission, their purpose in life.

At a small secluded retreat center in southcentral Kentucky, there's a chapel with a baptismal font on a simple plinth, standing right inside the door, one like I've ever seen. Not made of marble or mahogany or adorned with precious metals or stones, it's a plain pottery bowl, with only one distinguishing feature, a jagged crack from the rim down to about an inch above the base. It is, literally, a crackpot baptismal font, holding only enough water to baptize someone, while the rest pours out.

That's a vision of what you and me as the Church are meant to be, a big bunch of crackpots, viewed by some as ridiculous, but by others as the bearers and sharers of hope and grace. We might view that crack as an ugly flaw, as a liability to be covered over, concealed, and ignored, but a pot without a crack just contains things, and the Holy Spirit will not be contained. Instead of feeling ashamed about the cracks in our lives, we need to accept that without them God would not be able to work through us as witnesses and agents of his promise to flood the world with love.

Our cracks make us feel unworthy, and unworthy we are, but God always works through crackpots, people who don't quite have it all together. Moses murdered a man and felt utterly insufficient to serve as God's spokesman for Israel's liberation from Pharaoh. Elijah, a truth-

telling prophet to a corrupt royal court, ran for his life when threatened with death, as if God didn't have his back the whole time. Peter denied Jesus at the crucial moment. The rest of the disciples abandoned him altogether. Yet they were chosen as the messengers to bring good news to a world in dire need of it. Now we might feel intimidated by the idea that any of us could be anything like one of them, in part because we know it's risky. There's a lot to lose, but there's more to gain.

If we make room and offer a sincere invitation, the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with power, and the first step is to stop desperately trying to fill our emptiness through our own useless means and ask God to do that for us instead. Then the wind and fire of the Spirit will come and fill us, and in many ways both small and great, our cracks, source of such embarrassment, will leak out God's life-giving love into the world. Those jagged tears will be transformed into a sacred place where the glory of God abides and shines forth. No more shame. No mad scramble to plug it up. No more need to spin elaborate, shadowy tales to make sense of it all, because the wisdom of God brings understanding and peace.

So, my fellow crackpots, let's accept and allow the grace of God to flow through our flaws, both perceived and real, to serve as a vessel of healing and fulfillment. Some will see it as foolishness. Others will see it as a sinister plot. But some will receive it for what it is, the answer we all yearn and search for, a way to find meaning in life, order in the chaos, a way forward not dominated by fear but faith. That's the true mystery, one we cannot solve, but one that solves and saves us. Amen.