

“Crackpots”
The Reverend Michael L. Delk
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
Pentecost – 14 & 15 May 2016
Acts 2:1-21

We’ve all heard the word, and maybe used it, but never nicely. Crackpot. We ascribe this label to people who don’t quite fit the mold, people who view the world in radically different ways: you know, conspiracy theorists, who see government subterfuge everywhere, especially involving aliens from other worlds. These people, in their own divergent way, are attempting to impose order on insensible chaos. There must be some deeper reason, an elusive, hidden meaning that unlocks the mystery and makes sense of it all.

At the heart of every crackpot is a bereft 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 you are not alone. Far from it, the world is full of crackpots, hoping to be filled. It’s just that most people tend to seek other materials, like wealth or ideology or importance to stuff up that hole so that they can feel whole. Of course, these methods are futile. You can toss whatever you like into your emptiness, and it will vanish in an instant.

In fact, for the crackpots among us, among whom I include myself, we find ourselves in some exalted very 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 gave 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] Sometimes, life feels like a combination of The Truman Show and Waiting for Godot. The hopeless waiting of the play, accentuated by the mounting suspicion portrayed in the movie that in this shallow, unreal situation we're horribly exposed for all the world to see, and it makes us miserable.

Into this bottomless divot, God goes "Whoosh!" In the Apostles' hollow room, a mighty wind blew, and excitement and terror filled their hearts in equal measure. This was the 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; the whirlwind that led the people of Exodus from slavery and answered Job in his desperate confusion; the wind that marked the prelude of God's presence for the prophet Elijah when he hid on the mountain, afraid for his life. 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. It was 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. Descendants of the arrogant people who built the Tower of Babel, their ancestors assumed they could reach God on their terms through their own means, so the people were divided, separated by incompatible languages that prevented communication, which meant that even in their unity around the festival of Pentecost, they 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. Yet some disregarded the words as nonsense and sought some other way to fill their emptiness. They accused the disciples of being drunk, or today, we might simply have dismissed them as being crackpots. And in a way, crackpots are what the disciples were, what they had to be to receive the fulfillment that empowered them 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 right inside the door like none 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 'ole bunch of crackpots, viewed by many as ridiculous, but by some as the bearers and sharers of hope and grace. Only when we embrace our true identity as crackpots can we be honest about our emptiness and our need for God to fill that emptiness through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now 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 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. Take, for instance, Abraham. Don't even get me started on Abraham. 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 besotted with lies, ran for his life, as if God didn't have his back the whole time. Peter, who denied Jesus at the crucial moment, along with the rest of the disciples who abandoned him, 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.

The Spirit will fill us with power, if we make room for the Spirit, and the first step in making room is to stop desperately trying to fill our own emptiness and ask God to do that for us instead. Then the wind and fire of the Spirit will come and fill us, and in manifold ways, both small and great, our cracks, source of such embarrassment, will leak out God's life-giving love into the world. Amen.