

Pray.

What I notice in this passage:

All together

Suddenly a sound

All of them filled with the Spirit

Bewilderment – couldn't understand

Utterly amazed

Amazed and perplexed

What does this mean?

Have they had too much wine?

God says: I will pour out my Spirit on all people

They will prophesy, have visions, dream dreams

Even servants will receive

There will be wonders and signs

Call on the name of the Lord

Your senior pastor is about to leave you and day to day ministry for three months – about 90 days. He and his family have the incredible opportunity to step away from work and demands to get refreshed. The Lily Endowment provides this opportunity for clergy because the values and vision at Lily are about clergy wholeness. They recognize the relentlessness of ministry – Sunday comes every week; illness, deaths, celebrations don't happen around the pastor's calendar...they come just as vacations are beginning, when there is a family crisis of their own, when sermons need to be prepared.

Now, ministry isn't all negative. Obviously! There are many many wonderful benefits of being in full time parish ministry. The opportunity to study and be enriched, to share the Good News with others, to witness transformation in people's lives, to inspire people to be world changers – these are all aspects of ministry that define our call. But, ministry is 24/7 – probably like parenting, and probably like other professions. As clergy we are definitely fortunate that the Lily Corporation has singled us out for renewal grants.

So, you are probably talking a lot about what will happen with Pastor Mark during his leave. You are hearing how Pastor Lore and the rest of the staff will fill in the gaps. If you are on church committees or in leadership you have already been part of conversations about how decisions will be made and how information will be shared. The administrative side of preparing for a clergy renewal leave is full of details.

Even with the conversations about what will be different, you may not really yet have a full understanding about what this is all about. That's OK. For most people a sabbatical is a new experience – either for the one taking the sabbatical or for those who will be around while the person is away. Try not to worry about what those months will be like. As much planning that goes into preparing for the leave – you can be sure that some things will go not quite as planned, and that will be OK. Expectations you might have about anything will most likely be different than you imagine them now.

If you are skeptical about the sabbatical I would encourage you to think deeply about why that is. Perhaps you wish you could have a three month leave from your work. Or maybe you don't understand why your pastor needs time to rest and renew. You might be thinking those things. And of course, your pastors wishes you too could have a renewal leave if you need one. Let me say to you...as a person who has been on a sabbatical and as a person who has been in charge while someone else was on a sabbatical – this is a good thing. Whatever negative thoughts you might be having, they are not warranted.

Story about me and Matt and the negative thought cycle we get into. 3:1 ratio.

Let's approach this morning with positivity – with energy about the future. Let's begin right now to celebrate this wonderful opportunity for Pastor Mark and his family. And let's do that by celebrating the wonderful opportunity that all of YOU have to grow and be renewed while he is away.

When our senior pastor went on his Lily leave, I know he and LeeAnne were very excited to go. But, we were planning some cool things while they were away and I believe they probably had a sense of –darn, we'll miss some of these cool things!

Let's return to this Acts text and look at three phrases that jump out in the first few verses. These phrases will focus us to think about what God will do in the body of Christ.

SLIDE

1. All together ... and ready
verse 1 the writer tells us those who are present on the day of Pentecost are ALL TOGETHER. We know from later in the story that this was a diverse crowd – different languages, different cultures – but they were all together. We think of this as a unifying moment as the group came together in their differences and experienced something together. There is something very powerful about shared experiences. The experience connects people in a unique way.

During this sabbatical leave being ALL TOGETHER – being unified in attitude is hugely important. Pastor Mark needs to know that you are supportive. But, you will no doubt have unexpected experiences while he is away.

Suddenly – verse 2 the pace picks up in this story. While the people were all together, all of a sudden something happened. Now, we could speculate about why the Spirit came when they were all gathered – and could the Spirit have come upon them if they were scattered. But, what we need to pay attention to, is that as the people were gathered, when they weren't expecting it, God became very present to them.

Story of how Clay's Sabbatical time began: two funerals and a new building

SLIDE

2. NO ONE IS LEFT OUT
We learn also, that God's Spirit came upon ALL OF THEM. Not just the priests, not just the full time clergy, not just the men, not just the adults. God's Spirit came upon everyone! We forget that God moves in that way – that when we least expect it we are aware of God's presence. Verse 4 says, no one was left out.

Now some, were amazed, others were perplexed and wondered what was happening. It's good they were all together, because they could help each other figure it out and understand.

They asked questions, like 'what does this mean?' They speculated that some were just acting crazy. The Apostle Peter stood up and helped them understand what was happening.

Something will happen to each one of you. Not just during the Lily leave, but each day there's an opportunity for us to be aware of how God's Spirit is coming upon us. How will you respond when that happens? Will you be curious about how God is moving? Will you be judgmental of others? Will you help someone understand how God is moving in their life and in this congregation? Will you be amazed or will you be perplexed?

1 Peter 4:10 – Message translation: The Apostle Paul: various forms of grace.

Story about what happened to our staff team and congregation during the leave

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When Peter stands up to speak to them, he gathers them toward Jesus Christ.

3. EXPECT WONDERS AND SIGNS! because the Spirit has come upon them there will be wonders and signs in the heavens and on the earth. Because we are open to what God will do – because we are expectant to the way God works “suddenly”, we become empowered to do amazing things.

Friends, that is available to us all the time, no matter who is in leadership in your congregation, whether your senior pastor is here or on a renewal leave.

There is no doubt that God needs you and needs this congregation to be part of the kingdom life and changing the world.

Story about how the learnings continue – 3 years later – still Wonders and Signs!

This is a wonderful time in the life of your congregation! Stay all together and be ready...remember that God's spirit leaves no one out...and that because of God's wonderful way of moving in us we should expect wonders and signs – individually and collectively.

Augustine speaks of the mystery of how the spirit moves in us and the offering we make of ourselves to Christ – each of us...

Augustine quote: *Because you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your own mystery that lies on the altar, it is your own mystery that you receive...Be what you see there, and receive who you are.*

Pray.