

A double miracle

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Some of us are in Pentecost graduate school. We're seminary-educated and steeped in the church. We understand the preacher's dilemma when Easter comes early, before the earth has warmed up enough to take resurrection seriously, and we've been there, done that when it comes to the mighty rushing wind that appears seven weeks after Easter with great ecclesiastical regularity.

Others of us are in Pentecost kindergarten. We are not aware of the church year; we didn't even know the church *had* a year. We were not aware that, while from Christmas to Easter our story is Jesus' story—his birth, his parables, his death, at Pentecost we switch to the church's story and go until Christmas talking about ourselves and how we are the body of Christ, the way that Jesus' message rises from the dead over and over.

This story welcomes all grade levels—in fact it insists on diversity.

Usually,

I am almost jaded about Pentecost: here we go again with the mighty rushing wind, I think, with people speaking in tongues, with everybody understanding everybody else. The story of the Holy Spirit arriving and birthing a church so alive that others think it's drunk can seem pretty removed from the sober reality of church life. I much prefer the winter season.

Many of us have searched in vain for a church so on fire that it looks drunk. We have found way too much sobriety in church. But something has happened to me this year when it comes to this story: I am high on it. I am de-jading and returning to a childlike wonder about Pentecost, thanks to a new interpretation by Eric Law.

Law's

reading of Pentecost comes straight out of the heart of liberation theology: When the Spirit comes upon us, those of us who have power become quiet and those who do not have power speak. It's a double miracle of some speaking and others listening.

You probably know

this liberation yourself. It is the moment when you find your voice in a meeting and someone responds, "Aren't you new around here? Who said you could speak?" But you don't care because you aren't new anymore—you *spoke*. It's the moment in a family's life when everyone in charge finally hears the one who has been shut down.

Some

people do most of the talking most of the time. I used to keep a personal timer at boy/girl dinner parties and announce the results at the end of the evening. In my experience, boys talk five times as much as girls in public groups. Airtime is one of the ways power is defined: We voice, we name, we define, while other people—those without the airtime—are named and defined by us.

Some people have a systemic

microphone and others have none. Sexism, racism, homophobia and hate speech against immigrants arguably have their root in our desire to silence others. Systemic problems have their solution in another kind of speech, one in which each person both does some speaking and does some listening.

The double miracle has to be simultaneous to be

effective—just speaking, when no one is listening, doesn't help; nor does just listening without returning to speech. Pentecost is a simultaneous, mutually reinforcing miracle of the ear and the tongue. It de-jades us, renews us and makes us look like we are drunk.

We

read also this week of the dry bones rattling into life. They too drink of the cup of liberation, resurrection and the beautiful noise that rattles among us when we listen and speak fairly. This rattle of bone, the renewal of Israel, shouldn't surprise us in light of the double

miracle of Pentecost. Israel renews and death is conquered once God's people all have voices.