

## ***In the Middle of it All***

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come, that something amazing would happen after he was gone. There was no way to anticipate the utter chaos of what we call the Pentecost story. The spirit falling like flames. People breaking into strange languages, and because people from different nations gathered for the Festival of Sheaves, Shavuot<sup>1</sup>, they heard the disciples, local people, speaking in foreign languages. If you have been to foreign countries, you know, I know, the experience of hearing the din of people speaking a strange language. It is disorienting. What are they saying?

President Jimmy Carter was once interviewed by David Letterman, and President Carter shared story translation problems.<sup>2</sup> Carter was speaking to business people in Tokyo, Japan. He opened his speech with a brief joke. He waited for the translator to finish the Japanese version of the joke. His joke in English was short, but he was struck by how very short the Japanese translation was. Even more startling was the reaction of the listeners. His story was mildly humorous, but not hilarious – but these listeners were laughing heartily.

After the speech, Carter spoke with the translator, asked, how the joke had been told in Japanese.

The translator responded, "I told them, 'President Carter has told a very funny joke. Please laugh now.'"

There are some times when our analysis, our attempts to rationally understand a situation, is impossible. Some of the witnesses misinterpret this Pentecost moment, assuming from the strange speech patterns that Jesus' followers must be drunk. Chaos can become fertile ground for misunderstanding. It can foment polarization, if those who experience the confusion are not humble, and with open minds to see new possibilities. My friends, these are chaotic, confusing times. We are in the middle of it all. We cannot manage the polarization, the acrimony, at times, the outright hatred, malice, and manipulation around us. What we can manage our reaction to the chaos.

I am a casual fan of golf, but I became a captive audience on Friday. I was feeling under the weather, so I cancelled commitments and turned on the TV, the PGA Championship, and a bizarre story of the number one golfer in the world, Scottie Scheffler, arrested. The facts are still pretty confused, but a tragic accident resulting in a fatality snarled traffic just outside the golf club. It was dark, it was rainy, and Scottie needed to get into the golf course to prepare for the round, but he ended up in handcuffs, arrested, watching his friends pass by him in the back of a police cruiser, dumbfounded. It remains to be seen whether or not he did commit a crime. Amazing to everyone that day golfing, Scottie made it for his tee off time, ready to go, and he played

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<sup>1</sup> For more about Shavuot, or the Jewish Feast of Sheaves, visit:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shavuot-101/>

<sup>2</sup> From the website, faithwriters.com. Glenn Pease, 01/27/22. <https://www.faithwriters.com/article-details.php?id=211821>

an excellent round. At a press conference after his round, he was asked asking about how challenging it was to go out and play golf after everything that had happened.

His response was candid, that he was experiencing shock and fear. Imagine him doing his stretching, his warmup that would normally be at the club, but he was doing it in the jail cell. What helped him most, he said, “I did my best to control my mind, control my breathing.”<sup>3</sup>

I don’t know the experience of arrest hours before a big round of golf. However, I think that most or all of us have known chaotic moments where we might jump to a conclusion, or panic, or get caught up in a moment of heightened emotion, rather than stepping back a bit, and breathing through the moment. In those moments, we never get to the facts, the truth in the swirling chaos of that moment. The reactive, angry, manipulative, judgmental voices in the crowd can tend to define the narrative. May we, though, find that calm as Peter did, to breathe, then:

- to speak a word of hope when times seem desperate;
- to choose actions that reconcile brokenness, that heal wounds, that respond to hatred with unconditional love.

Then, breathe again. Remember, the Greek word for Spirit, “Pneuma” (πνεῦμα), also means *breath*. Come Spirit, breathe on us! Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> My source for this perspective, from [www.inc.com](https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/with-6-words-scottie-scheffler-addressed-arrest-taught-a-lesson-in-emotional-intelligence.html), “With 6 Words, Scottie Scheffler Addressed His Arrest Friday and Taught a Lesson in Emotional Intelligence.” May 18, 2024. Jason Aten. For the full article: <https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/with-6-words-scottie-scheffler-addressed-arrest-taught-a-lesson-in-emotional-intelligence.html>