

ATOMIC LOVE
Randall Tremba
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Pentecost
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Acts 2:1-21

The first lesson could be summarized something like this:

Once upon a time something amazing happened on the festival day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. A certain small community was dispirited. Jesus, the light and hope of the world, was gone. They were immobilized. Paralyzed. Dejected.

And then the wind blew. They took a deep breath. Something inflamed their hearts. And just like that, that dispirited community was filled with power. It stood up, stepped out and boldly began building a worldwide community more beautiful, more inclusive, more whole and holy than the one they thought they'd lost.

This is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost can be any day, anytime, anywhere. Pentecost is any time we realize the latent power of love within the world and within our hearts. Dispirited peoples and communities are inspired. The Spirit comes and we come alive. Hope rises out of despair.

And that brings us to the second lesson.

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we are saved.

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Seventy years ago this month the atomic bomb was given a partial test at White Sands, New Mexico. The full and complete test would come in July. And then on August 6th—despite fierce objections by some American scientists, politicians and military leaders—an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and three days later, another on Nagasaki.

The destruction of roads, bridges, homes, schools, hospitals, temples, and lives in just two days by just two bombs was unprecedented. Humanity had created its most vile and deadly invention. Even more deadly inventions would follow. The secret was out. There was no going back.

But it's not the only secret in this world that's out.

In case you hadn't noticed, we are an ingenious species with near infinite capabilities. And that's why it is said of us that we are "made in the image of God," which is one way of saying we have divine-like capacities. We don't need the Bible to tell us that. We can see it for ourselves.

Our great ancestors saw it and put it in their mythic tale of creation. As the story goes in Genesis 1, after creating animals with amazing but limited capabilities, God created humankind in the image of God, endowed with the creator's own creativity. It was a quantum leap in evolutionary consciousness.

So, yes, be in awe of humanity—and be afraid. Be very, very afraid for this evolutionary novelty can go awry—very, very awry. It all depends on the choices we make. For you see, the human capacity to make consequential choices also exceeds that of animals.

At times we are glorious and admirable. At other times we are heinous and disgusting.

For example, consider the flamethrower, an invention that preceded the atomic bomb by thousands of years. George Carlin, the late, great comic, put it like this. *“The very existence of flamethrowers proves that at some time, somewhere, someone said to themselves, ‘You know, I want to set those people over there on fire, but I’m just not close enough to get the job done.’”*

That’s one side of us—and that means you and me.

But there are also days when we see others suffering half way around the world or on the other side of the room and say: *I want to help those people. What can I do to reach them?*

That’s a question the Irish people recently asked themselves and then answered it yesterday by approving marriage equality through a national referendum. The Irish people organized and mobilized to create something good, holy and wholesome in their country.

Seventy years ago the United States faced—what it considered—a major threat to civilization. In response to that threat, through a massive national effort—known as the Manhattan Project—we created the atomic bomb. A community of scientists was hastily assembled and quickly found a way to invent and unleash a horrific destructive force upon the world.

Today the whole world, the whole planet is threatened by death in one form or another. Now is not the time to despair. Now is the time to keep hope alive. We know how to cooperate. We know how to organize and mobilize. We’ve done it before. We can do it again.

The spirit prays within us with sighs too deep for words. (Romans 8)

You might be surprised to know how many good things are happening all over the world. Open your eyes, pay attention, listen, read, and you will discover people and communities just about everywhere organizing and mobilizing to conquer fear, greed, bigotry, violence and hatred with love.

Today is Pentecost. Today we celebrate the power of the Spirit to transform people and communities.

The power compressed in the atom was once a hidden secret. The hidden power of love in our hearts should not be a secret.

Let it out. Let it breathe. And let it be.

Come, Spirit, come.

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Hymn 24

God, who stretched the spangled heavens
Infinite in time and place,
Flung the suns in burning radiance
Through the silent fields of space:
We, your children in Your likeness
Share inventive powers with You;
Great Creator, still creating,
Show us what we yet may do.

We have ventured worlds undreamed of
Since the childhood of our race;
Known the ecstasy of winging
Through untraveled realms of space,

Probed the secret of the atom,
Yielding unimagined power;
Facing us with life's destruction
Or our most triumphant hour.

As each far horizon beckons,
May it challenge us anew:
Children of creative purpose,
Serving others, honoring You.
May our dreams prove rich with promise;
Each endeavor well begun;
Great Creator, give us guidance
Till our goals and Yours are one.

Catherine Cameron