

I have this feeling that the closest I will ever get to understanding the whole Pentecost story was a seminary class that took us to Israel and Palestine. It was a time when, huge surprise, tensions ran high between the Israeli armed forces and Hamas from the West Bank. Missiles were launched as we were on our flight to Tel Aviv. Some of the sites we were meant to see, we, then, had to avoid because they were within reach of the Hamas terrorist group. Nevertheless, on a Sunday morning in Jerusalem, we went to the Church of the Redeemer, only a few blocks from where we were staying in that ancient city.

What I still remember to this day, is when we got to the Lord's Prayer during the service, because the people gathered there were asked to pray in their own respective language. So, while we spoke our English, there was also Arabic, Hebrew, German, and plenty of other languages, since people from all over the world were worshiping in the church that day.

I can't explain that feeling. I don't have the words to fully describe it, but it almost felt like a rush of a violent wind, as it is told of the Pentecost story: a surreal rush. Because in the background of Israel and

Palestine was, and is, hatred and violence to the point that people, who leave their homes, are not guaranteed to come back alive. If there is any place in the world to have lost all hope imaginable, the Middle East is right near the top. Last week, it happened again, as scores of human life were torn apart. It would be completely understandable for, at any point during the last half-century, that the people there would have given up entirely: so much war, so much bloodshed, so much horror on a far-too-often basis.

But in that very sanctuary, appropriately called, to say the least, on that Sunday morning years ago, a surreal rush went through me: to hear just the slightest semblance of unity, of hope, of peace. That all these people from all these different places with languages as vast in number as on that Pentecost Day centuries ago, can pray for the same thing, cling to the same yearning for a better world.

Of course, that day in Jerusalem was almost ten years ago now. Tensions were high then, and they're just as high now. And we don't get to say that such animosity against people with different histories and different languages only happens in Israel and Palestine, because it

happens in our own backyard too. And time and time again we pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Nevertheless, the animosity rages on without a hitch.

It would be completely understandable to lose all hope, to, quite simply, give up on any chance of a surreal rush of peace to take over God’s world. Except, the disciples were in rather similar circumstances long ago too. Their world was in complete devastation come an awful Good Friday on a Calvary hill. They were in absolute fear, even after their Savior rose from the dead. They felt so utterly lost after Jesus ascended into heaven.

And then this Pentecost happens, and God unleashed a rush not just a violent wind with tongues of fire, but a rush of hope, of new life, of an undeniable life-altering mission to let the world know that God loves them all. But the problem with this whole Pentecost thing is that the disciples were expected to take on the very ministry Jesus Christ brought to life. They couldn’t just return to their homes and pray all day and night expecting God to take care of it all for them from some divine

headquarters up in the heavens. Evidently, God unleashed the Holy Spirit for them to get to work.

So, fast-forward about two thousand years in Jerusalem, when we prayed the Lord's Prayer in who knows how many different languages that filled up the sanctuary that Sunday morning: that surreal rush has a way of leaving a mark on the soul, completely altering the entirety of our existence. Those moments tend to never leave our memory, whether it happened in a sanctuary, in a hospital room, at our home, in a car on a long road trip, wherever it may be: God has this way of unleashing a rush to all of us in unique ways that are special to us, just enough to push us forward, just enough to convince us this life is more than worth it, just enough to believe this God is still up to something in this world, that for some reason beyond our understanding, God still loves that very same world. And the Holy Spirit continues to ignite in us each and every day the drive we need to proclaim to all people we meet that God cherishes them, all the way from the beginning to a cross and an empty tomb and all the way into eternity. And for that, we most certainly give thanks to God indeed! Amen.