MUGGLES NO MORE

Acts 2:1-21

May 23, 2021

Day of Pentecost

A giant man came crashing into the drafty shack, stunning 11 year old Harry Potter and his horribly heartless aunt, uncle and cousin. The giant was named Hagrid, sent by the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to fetch young Harry.

“He’s not going,” sputtered cruel Uncle Vernon.

Hagrid the shaggy giant grunted, “I’d like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him,” he said.

“A what?” said Harry, interested.

“A Muggle,” said Hagrid, “it’s what we call nonmagic folk like them. An’ it’s your bad luck you grew up in a family o’ the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on.“

“We swore when we took him in we’d put a stop to that rubbish,” said Uncle Vernon, “swore we’d stamp it out of him! Wizard, indeed!”

“You KNEW?” said Harry. “You KNEW I’m a – a wizard?”

“Knew!” shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. “KNEW! Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak!”

What Aunt P and Uncle V do not realize is that in the world of Harry Potter, they’re the freaks – not Harry and his fellow witches and wizards. There’s nothing evil about having magical powers in these wonderful fantasies by J.K. Rowling, and a great many characters use their magic to do magnificently moral and virtuous things.

The Muggles are the sad and sickly and silly in these stories – non-magical persons like Aunt Petunia, a shrill and shrewlike soul who has nothing better to do than spy on her neighbors.

Now, some churchgoing Christians busted on these books, saying that it is wrong to paint a positive picture of wizards and witches . . . wrong to be soft on magical spells . . . wrong to make Harry a hero. To which I for one, can only say, Lighten up, folks!

Harry Potter is not evil. He doesn’t worship Satan. He doesn’t abuse innocents, subvert goodness or undermine morality. To say that these books encourage witchcraft is to say that books about UFOs encourage consorting with aliens, or that C.S. Lewis’s Narnia Series (you may know the title of the first of them – it’s *The Lion the Witch, and the Wardrobe*) [that the Narnia series] should be banned. Harry Potter and *Narnia* are fantasy worlds.

Once you get your first taste of magic, you’ll never want to be a Muggle again. My imagination is taken by the game of quidditch, which is a sort of polo/soccer/hockey type game played in the air . . . on broomsticks. I’d love to do that. Or the ability to throw lightning with your wand. And more.

We’re talking about a life-changing leap here, one from which there’s no jumping back. Once you enter the world of magic, it’s “Muggle no more.” And although it may come as a surprise, much the same transformation occurred when the Holy Spirit made a Pentecost Day visit to Jerusalem’s Muggles a few days after Jesus lifted off from Cape Olivet in Acts 1.

“What now?” wondered these heaven-gazing head-scratchers. Jesus had promised them power from on high, power that would enable them to go to the ends of the earth, to continue his miracles, to preach the gospel, to face persecution. Jesus predicted the coming of a power so great that a sorcerer later in Acts would offer to buy the power of their “magic” from Peter. But first, they had to wait, and so they devoted themselves to prayer.

But they didn’t have to wait long.

On Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrived –busting into their lives like Hagrid the shaggy giant splintering a door. The Spirit rushed over them with the sound of a violent wind, danced on their heads like divided tongues of fire, filled them with Almighty Power, and gave them the ability to speak in languages that they had never learned. In a flash, the followers of Jesus were Muggles no more, and the church exploded as an amazing, astonishing, perplexing, and utterly magical movement.

But hold on a sec; put down the wizard’s wand. Is it appropriate to call the power of the Holy Spirit “magic”? Was it magic that caused a gaggle of Galileans to begin speaking the languages of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Egyptians,Cretans, and Arabs? Was it magic that inspired Peter to overcome his cowardice and address thousands of people with the powerful promise of salvation for “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” (Acts2:21)?

No, not exactly. It wasn’t magic in the Harry Potter or the Narnia style, but it still seems magical. And maybe that isn’t such a bad thing. The Spirit’s work in the church and in us, is magical, if by magic you mean the miracle of:

* being able to transcend your humanness.
* -being able to reach the unreachable.
* -having peace in the midst of a storm.
* having concern for the least of your brothers and sisters.

When the Spirit comes, we are transformed by a transcendent power. But perhaps there are many of us who still act like nontranscendent people, who fail to take our spiritual lives to another level of daily reliance on the One who brings power and enabling beyond our own human resources. Perhaps there are some of us who don’t fully accept the fact that God has made us Muggles no more.

So how does Pentecost move us from being Muggle People to being Miracle People? For starters, the Holy Spirit gives us power to go beyond our human limitations, to reach the formerly unreachable, to speak new languages and to take strong stands with fresh convictions. No, we’re not wizards with well-trained message-carrying owls and magic wands that enable us to conjure up courage. But we do have a Spirit in us and among us that inspires us to carry our faith across barriers of culture, race, and nationality, and to take a stand for the life-giving hope that burns within us.

Have you ever heard of “Hollywood Jesus?” It’s a website created by California pastor David Bruce, on which he writes film reviews designed to introduce Web surfers to Jesus. Bruce sees himself as a missionary to a “pre-Christian” world, one so influenced by motion pictures, that films have become the world’s common language. “Through “Hollywood Jesus,” Bruce engages ‘pre-Christians’ (those who have yet to find Christ) in an exploration of ethical, moral and even Christian themes in popular movies. When these bridges are crossed, Bruce says he is able to cross over them with the gospel. Every review ends with a link to a presentation of the gospel and an email address for responses. “Hollywood Jesus” is no Muggle.

The Spirit also calls you and me to move to a new level of daily reliance on God, one that will give us deeper serenity in the midst of our personal storms, and greater concern for the welfare of persons being tattered by tempests around us. It is only through reliance on the presence and power of God that we can face what J.K Rowling calls “dementors”—horrid hooded apparitions that breed in the darkest, filthiest places, create decay and despair, and drain peace, hope, and happiness out of any human who comes too close to them.

But we already know about dementors, don’t we? Perhaps they’re a painful mental state, such as depression, or panic attacks. Maybe they’re the anguish a neighbor feels as she watches her husband deteriorate through Altzheimer’s. Maybe they’re the grief a fellow church member is suffering after the sudden death of a child. Maybe they’re the hopelessness a single mother is feeling as she struggles to provide for her newborn./ We all have our dementors, and we all need God to keep us from being destroyed by therm. And maybe, just maybe, God is giving you and me the resources we need to reach out to our neighbors and to drive dementors from their doors.

With the miraculous, our Lord is often generous. Peter was given the gift of courage, so he could preach to the people of Jerusalem. The apostles were offered the gift of languages so they could speak to visitors from every nation. God gives us what we need, and when we accept His gifts, He sends us out to do great and glorious things in the world.

If we rely on the great gift, the Holy Spirit, the giver of all these gifts, we’ll be Miracle People rather than Muggle People -- ordinary folks full of extraordinary power, as fantastic as Harry and Hagrid, and as faithful as Peter and the apostles. Once we get our taste of the Holy Spirit, there’s no turning back – we’ll never want to be nonmagical people again.

Amen.