

Press Statement Joyce Hollyday

On Monday, May 20, a group of religious leaders held a press conference in front of the Asheville courthouse, to protest state budget cuts. Circle of Mercy co-pastor Joyce Hollyday offered the following statement:

Yesterday, those of us who claim the name Christian observed Pentecost. We heard again the story of the Holy Spirit appearing to the believers in Jerusalem, birthing the church amid a mighty wind and tongues of fire.

I think it's impossible to hear this story, recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, without reading on to the end of that chapter. There we learn that the early Jerusalem Christians held all things in common, selling private possessions to redistribute wealth and meet the needs of the most vulnerable among them.

This wasn't some blueprint for church growth. It wasn't socialism in disguise. This was simply what happened when believers were anointed by, and opened their hearts to, the Holy Spirit. They became kind, and generous, and lived by a commitment to the common good.

If only it were so now. Instead, we find ourselves living in a state whose government has utterly rejected the notion of the common good and cut off support to those who are most in need of it.

It wasn't always so here. In 2009, after a long battle, we made history by becoming the first state to pass a Racial Justice Act, addressing systemic discrimination in death-penalty cases. For a brief moment, the 149 inmates on North Carolina's death row who have filed challenges to their convictions had a glimpse of hope.

One of those challenges was heard in court—just one—which led to the overturning of the death sentence of Marcus Robinson. And then the door was slammed shut. Early last month, after repeated attempts, the state senate repealed the Racial Justice Act, paving the way to resume executions and essentially making the statement that racial discrimination just doesn't matter.

Friends, we are here today to say that racial discrimination does matter—and it will not be tolerated. Whatever it takes, we are going to pry that door back open.

In the meantime, I want to alert our state legislators that the Holy Spirit has a way of seeping into the cracks. She doesn't knock; and she doesn't wait for an open door.

A few years ago, just before Christmas, I met a six-year-old named Kyle, who got his stories scrambled. He was reciting the biblical account of the birth of Jesus, and he did just fine until he got to the part about the angels appearing to the shepherds and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace." He remembered the "Glory to God" part, but then his mind went blank. He thought hard. Then his face brightened, and he said proudly, "And the angels appeared to the shepherds and said, 'Glory to God in the highest...and I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!'"

This is the hurricane-force wind that we're feeling from Raleigh—huffing and puffing that is blowing away racial justice, and affordable homes, and food programs, and protection for survivors of domestic violence. There is no peace with this gale blowing.

But, friends, we are here because a stronger wind than this is moving among us. It's a Pentecost wind, and it cannot be stopped or contained.

So watch out, legislators—the Holy Spirit may just enter your heart like a mighty gale or a tongue of fire and transform you into someone who cares about the people you're voting into oblivion and condemning to misery. At least we pray so. Consider yourself warned, in love.