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Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35,37

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27,16:4-15

May 23, 2021

The Day of Pentecost

Last week, we spent some time considering those words and phrases that we use every week in our liturgy but may not really have a good grasp of what they mean. Likewise, if we don't have a good understanding of what they mean, it's very difficult to figure out why they matter in our lives and how we apply them to daily living.

This week, I want to expand on that idea. So, let's begin this morning with a church history lesson. I thought it would benefit us to take a moment to remind ourselves of the significance of this day on our liturgical calendar. But, first...a pop quiz. (Don't groan too loudly).

- 1) What do we commemorate today as part of our religious observance?
- 2) What does the word Pentecost mean? In the Hebrew text? In the New Testament?

Today is Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost meaning "the fiftieth day" is referenced in both the Hebrew text and the New Testament. But the reason for the observance is different for each audience. For the Jews, Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) was an agricultural observance in gratitude for a good harvest. It happened on the 50th day after Passover.

In the New Testament, Pentecost is a day that marks the giving of the Holy Spirit to humanity after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus promised we would not be without him and the fulfillment of his promise was the Holy Spirit coming into the world and drawing the body of Christ together into one community...a worldwide collective of believers invigorated by the Spirit to share the love of Christ with the world.

- 3) In our church service, when did we first light the Paschal candle this year?
- 4) What does the Paschal Candle represent?

The Paschal Candle was lit on Easter morning as we recognize the light of Christ coming into the world. We leave it lit throughout our Easter season...which extends for 50 days after Easter Sunday and concludes today...on Pentecost.

- 5) Why do we put out the Paschal Candle on Pentecost?

We put out the candle today after the service because we recognize that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, God is with us in a new way. We are not alone, even though Jesus has ascended into heaven, because the Spirit has descended into our lives and into our hearts to enliven all that we do in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now, that's your church history lesson...but, do we really understand what this light means for our lives and what it means for the world? How are we to comprehend the Holy Spirit as a real and true and active part of our lives?

Let's look at our text from Acts.

"⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each."

Acts gives us a detailed account of what is happening on Pentecost. The Disciples are gathered together and all around them are Jews from "*every nation under heaven*." It's a diverse crowd to be sure. Suddenly, the Spirit descends upon the disciples and the crowd is able to understand the disciples in their own native language...those people who are there from every nation under heaven. That's like you or me listening to someone speak a language we know nothing about and miraculously, we hear and comprehend that language with fluency.

Think of it this way...God's love is overflowing throughout humanity, loving us in the midst of our uniqueness, uplifting our diversity and all the while helping us to build connections in the midst of our difference. Yet, this bridge building that is taking place is disruptive holy action to be sure...The crowd is bewildered. What does this mean, they ask? We have never understood one another before, much less hung out as friends. We are all so different...how can we now listen and understand each other?

Notice that we do not hear that the people change who they are. They don't become cookie cutter versions of each other. They don't dress the same or act the same or look the same. We are only told that they understand one another.

Might the richness of this story be that the Holy Spirit comes among this wildly diverse group of people and honors who they are while giving them the spirit of love and patience and kindness to listen and learn from one another? To build community. To create peace.

Even Peter, in quoting the prophet Joel, emphasizes this fact when he says that the Spirit is poured out for all flesh regardless of gender, age, or social status. The Spirit is poured out on everyone equally. It's a beautiful lesson for the world we live in today. It's a beautiful example of what the light of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can do in our lives right now...in Goochland County, in our nation, and in our world.

Romans calls this holy action the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits that save us and redeem us, the fruits that help us in our weakness and provide for us a profound hope that moves us towards a life of peace with one another.

You all know the familiar words of Galatians 5:

"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control."

Read that again...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Can you imagine anything more beautiful? Those qualities are the Spirit made manifest in our lives. That's the Spirit growing in our hearts. And folks, the world needs this so much right now. We all do.

As we regather we have an opportunity unlike anything in our recent history. We have a chance to reevaluate how we are using the gifts of the Spirit. We have a chance to start anew. We have a chance to approach one another with the Spirit's indwelling of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We have a chance to let the Holy Spirit change us for the better.

Debie Thomas said it so well...

"There is no way to overstate how much we need to gather as God's people right now and ask the Holy Spirit to instruct us, shape us, remake us, and commission us. We need fresh languages of bridge-building. We need new words to rekindle love. We need the wind and fire of God to challenge our complacencies, reset our priorities, ease our anxieties, and move us out."¹

I want you all to think of Pentecost as a beginning. A new beginning. Let this day breathe new life into your heart...new life that brings growth, commitment, and renewed energy to ground your life in Christ. New life that helps you listen and learn from one another. New life that guides you in compassionate living. New life that honors our differences and builds bridges of understanding and unity. That's God vision for us. That's the Holy Spirit's mission in our lives. This is Pentecost.

Amen.

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3017>