

## **Day of Pentecost May 19 2024**

### **Acts 2:1-13**

I've been doing some re-thinking about the day of Pentecost this year. Often in the Christian church we talk about it as the birthday of the church. Something new that God is doing in the world.

But what if it isn't something new, as in unique? What if we think of Pentecost as an extension of something God has been doing since that first fracture of God's relationship with humans through our disobedience, our trusting in ourselves and our judgment more than in God and God's wisdom.

What if the Christian Pentecost is one more movement of God towards us in the healing of that wound?

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Jewish Festival of Weeks. It occurs fifty days after the festival of Passover. Where it fell in the year means that this is a harvest festival. In the Hebrew Bible book of Leviticus, it requires an offering to God of the first fruits of the harvest- bread, newborn lambs, and more. It is a celebration of abundance and of God's promised life-long provision for God's people. If you believed in scarcity, you wouldn't kill the newborn lambs. You would save them to ensure next year's abundance. So, Pentecost is a communal way of showing that the God of this year's abundance is steadfast and trustworthy in the future. A true statement of faith, trust, in God and God's provision.

Pentecost is a festival that in the book of Deuteronomy includes everyone- slaves, strangers, orphans, widows, as well as the faithful. It is a festival in which all

benefit as everyone takes the day off work. Abundance is celebrated, not as a “blessing” to be hoarded, but as a gift to be shared with the entire community. This is why in harvesting, the command is to leave the edges of the field untouched, so that those without means to support themselves (widows, orphans, aliens in the land) can come and glean that produce so they may live. In this way, the landed share with the non-landed folk, the residents share with the aliens, widows and orphans glean produce because, in God’s economy, abundance leads to everyone having what they need- enough. Which is one definition of justice.

Pentecost, in the Hebrew way of thinking, was essentially a celebration for those who had been lifted out of poverty and slavery in Egypt, a celebration that called them to remember that abundance and freedom obligate us to those who continue to live in poverty and chains.

In Christian terms, this extends to our Pentecost celebration as a reminder that we live in the reign of God, the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus came to proclaim had come near in him. A reign that the Jesus who is ascended has taught us means to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, free the bound. It means loving neighbors in the same way God in Jesus has loved us. Without discrimination or reservation. And that those who are our neighbor is anyone in need.

That Pentecost ideal is lived out in the early church. You know, the one in Acts 2 where they hold everything in common and made sure that no one had any need. An extension of the meaning of the Jewish Festival of Weeks.

What if we saw in the Christian celebration of Pentecost an extension of God's pursuit of God's people through the ages.

From that first moment of Adam and Eve not trusting in God's abundance and provision, but instead trusting their own decisions, God has sought to bring us back into the garden. Into the reign of God. To bring us home.

Pentecost is not a beginning per se, but a landmark in the history of reconciliation God has sought with humanity throughout the ages. One that comes to completion in the fullness of who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have in the witness of Acts echoes of the ages long story of God and humans. We have in this story a reversal of the Tower of Babel- a confusion of language that excludes and separates humankind. Instead, we have a radical inclusion in the reign of God to both Jews and Gentiles (the nations of the earth represented here by a plethora of regional names, a listing of the nations, if you will).

Note, those assembled on Pentecost were Jews. There would have been two common languages that united these Jewish people living in the Roman and Parthian empires: Greek and Aramaic. Greek was the common language for the western provinces of the Roman Empire. Given this fact, it is no wonder Peter was able to address the crowd on the day of Pentecost without need for translation. Toward the East, the Jews who were "residents of Mesopotamia" spoke, Aramaic as their native tongue. Likewise, those Jews from Media, Arabia, Elam, and Palestine (where the disciples were from) would have spoken Aramaic as their first language, with Greek for many, if not all of them, as a second or third tongue/language.

What brought about bewilderment and (2:6-12) ridicule (2:13) was how the wonders of God were being declared in Aramaic and Greek, when these Galileans should have known that only Hebrew was permitted to be spoken when praying, singing, or speaking of God's Word in the Temple. They were in violation of an established tradition.

Peter is probably not given a new language in 2:14. Instead, his speech is described as bold, authoritative, and inspired by the Spirit. The miraculous work of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was about inspiring the Gospel message and empowering it with authority and efficacy, remarkably in Greek and Aramaic- a common language.

Pentecost is the beginning of the re-gathering of what had been scattered. A reunification of what had been divided. It is the breath of God that re-animates our dry bones. Pulls us together.

And this happens, in the church- that is gathered around the Word of God which is Jesus. That is stirred, given breath, moved by the Spirit of God that comes alongside us and within us. An assembly of believers where we find, at our best, the manifestation of that original relationship of God with us in the Garden.

Pentecost, then, is not a new thing, but a return to what was.

What then does this mean for us? How is the Spirit calling us to speak and live God's truth into the world in a way people can hear?

For we, too, have received that promised spirit of holiness. We confess that like Jesus, when we are baptized that Spirit descends upon us, blowing the lifegiving

breath of God into us. Empowering us with gifts. You have gifts from God through the Holy Spirit. Perhaps not as outwardly spectacular as the universal rhetoric of Peter, but no less power. You have gifts of compassion, teaching, helping. Gifts with your hands, music, the knack of knowing how things work. Gifts that, when shared, make life for everyone a bit easier. That speak of abundance. That are the means by which everyone can have enough.

If Pentecost is an extension of what was, how is the Spirit calling us to live as a people of faith? This Spirit pushes the disciples out to proclaim what God has done for them in Jesus Christ to all they meet. Not just a specific group, but everyone. Peter even goes among the Gentiles, Paul makes them his mission field. As we heard just a few weeks ago, Philip goes to an Ethiopian eunuch, and by the direction of the Holy Spirit proclaims the Word to the eunuch. Such that the Ethiopian eunuch asks, “Here is water, what is to prevent me from being baptized.” And the answer is... nothing. Not the fact that he is Ethiopian with dark skin, that he is a slave in a foreign court, that he is a eunuch.

Who are the people in our community that we just automatically say, well we can't proclaim this to them! What barriers do we put up in ourselves or in front of others? Oh Holy Spirit, blow through those barriers.

There are those among us today who are going out into the world- to college, to careers, into a world that is increasingly NOT interested in this proclamation. At least partly because the world does not see the Spirit at work in what we do.

I would pray that the Spirit of God blow in us today. Stir us up to trust in the Father who created all that exists and who in the waters of baptism has claimed

us as beloved children. Stir us up to follow after Jesus, God's Son and our Lord, who leads us beside still waters and into the broken places of the world to bring the same healing, comfort, and reconciliation he has brought to us. Stir us up, like our ancestors in the faith, to bear witness to the wide welcome that we have received in God.

I pray these things and stand in awe of the fact that today we are included in this ages long work of God's reconciliation of the world to Godself. Included not because of anything we have done, but purely because God has made it so. Because God has so loved us and this wide world that God has sent all of who God is- God's Son Jesus, the animating and creating breath of God that is the Holy Spirit- so that this world might not perish but have life abundant.

Come, Holy Spirit, come that we might be part of the fulfillment of God's reconciliation with the world.