

## June 5, 2022 - John 14: 25-27

### PENTECOST

Those of us who have been around the church for a while know the basic story of Pentecost, but a little refresher won't hurt.

Pentecost - one of three (some scholars say four) holy feast days in the Old Testament. It was celebrated between the end of the barley harvest and the start of the summer wheat harvest. Preparations included decorating the temple sacred spaces with garlands and canopies, and baking leavened bread (not unleavened bread, the food of slaves). No ordinary work was to be done, except harvesting of barley if necessary. As Israel became more and more urban and the local synagogue achieved greater prominence in the worship life of the nation, the harvest focus was replaced with the study of the Torah - the Books of Moses which are the true milk and honey (so sweet) of the promised land. God grants productive fields, but more importantly, God grants His Word that truly feeds God's people.

As Luke records it, on the day of Pentecost, all (women, men and children) were gathered together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, filling the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues of fire rested upon each one of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2: 1-4). This account of the presence of the Holy Spirit is in contrast with the other account in the Bible where folks spoke in a multitude of languages: the story of the Tower of Babel. In Genesis, chapter 11, the people desired to build a mighty tower to reach into heaven and become like God. Archaeologists have found evidence throughout the Middle East and Africa of cities with houses, temples and palaces of many stories. Because the builders of the Tower of Babel sought to become gods, God dispersed the people over the face of the earth, creating many languages, confusion and disunity. The origin story of different cultures and many languages and tribal conflict has its roots in the reality that human nature is sinful.

Babel in the Old Testament means many languages, discord, and the inability to understand and accept one another. Pentecost in the New Testament means many languages that create understanding and acceptance, resulting in community and togetherness. In the Old Testament, God's people were formed by following the Law, by circumcision and an ethnic identity. The new identity of the Spirit filled folk in the Book of Acts is formed by the Lordship of Jesus. The new social cohesion, bringing many people into one grouping, is found in what they share; Jesus is the Word they follow, the Life with whom they live, and the One whose gift is the Holy Spirit.

Today we celebrate the birthday of the church, which is a signpost for the nations, a marker for all creation because the church promises a taste, a tempting taste, of the divine life to come in Christ. Christians in the Spirit with one another show the world a

new way of living in peace together. The same Spirit who brings us together in peace welcomes non-believers into the Christian fellowship. The same Spirit deepens our identity as Christians so that we engage joyfully in God's saving work of salvation.

There may be countless ways in which the Holy Spirit transforms us into people who love one another in Christ, for the Spirit can be very creative - remember the strong wind that was not a destructive storm, and the dancing flames that illuminated but did not burn. Regardless of how the Spirit works among us, the work of the Spirit is always the same - we become aware of one another as real people. One author describes it as experiencing one another with a 2nd person experience. To know someone as a 2nd person is to know that person better than what you know about that person.

A 2nd person experience is when you hold a baby in your arms and already love that child without knowing anything about that child. The same is true for lovers, who love one another as a person with hopes, dreams, preferences, motivations, and not because of shoe size or left handedness or hair color. To have a 2nd person experience with another is the difference between looking at someone, and looking into their eyes.

Invite examples.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those whom the Spirit calls to pastoral ministry with you. We remembered past clergy and their families during the Clergy Review on May 1st. How could there not be a sense of loss when the minister leaves? Didn't some among us know a bit of grief when other staff depart - choir directors and church secretaries and youth leaders? Paul writes to remind us that even that our sense of loss is touched by the divine. The Holy Spirit brings our loss and grief into the healing presence of God; we offer to God our hurt and sorrow for God to redeem as we welcome new staff today and more new staff in the weeks ahead.

We should not forget the past nor try to fix the past. WPC is not the same church this morning as it was last year at Pentecost - as it was 5 years ago - 45 years ago. These changes disrupt our comfort level, if only a little. Our life together is be different, and this difference can be disquieting. Yet in the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can know a new hope in God's promises. God desires us. God loves us. All our tomorrows are accounted for in God's future for us. Allow that assurance of God's love to inform your hearts this morning. Remember the experiences of the divine, of the Holy Spirit present with us. It was a moment of Pentecost long ago when they gathered in the upper room. There is a time for Pentecost this morning. The Holy Spirit is once again present with us as we worship today, and is with us in every act of worship by the people of God. As John wrote in his gospel, This is the witness we bear in the spirit of truth. Amen.