

SUMMARY: PENTECOST 2021

Acts 2:1-13

Today is Pentecost Sunday! We get the word *Pentecost* from the Greek word simply meaning "fiftieth". In the Jewish tradition it coincided with the festival of *Shavuot* which was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover. In Christianity we celebrate Pentecost after the same period but, of course, following Easter. *I think that there may be beautiful parallels here between the Jewish and Christian festivals for us to explore sometime...*

This day marks God's 'Holy-Spirit-empowering' of the church that Jesus Christ had established. It marks God's outpouring of God's own sacred Presence into the most acute awareness of all those who have been given to respond to Christ.

'...how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?' We're focusing today on what it means that they were understood by all sorts of foreigners way beyond just the physical words that were being formed by their tongues and coming out of their mouths reversing what happened in the OT at the construction of the Tower of Babel.¹ Here, they were given to speak in a language that all people could understand! Do we have the ability to speak intelligibly regardless of others' ethnicity? Are there languages today that can do that? *I think there are – and that we use them – both for good and bad!*

We don't need any multi-lingual skill to interpret the language of scorn, anger, disdain, contempt, hatred... We absolutely know when people are speaking with disrespect or hostility, and that quite regardless of whatever physical words are coming out of their mouths - as we know when it's kindness, acceptance, reverence...

I think back to Linda and me travelling in Europe in the mid 1980s and trying to ask for directions, in English, from this haughty Parisian businessman, obviously disgusted by our lack of French. And yet on that same trip, I think of the warmth and hospitality we received from that large, exclusively German speaking, Innkeeper in Innsbruck – Katie Wulff – who made us feel SO welcome, and SO at home! As we receive a sense of being appreciated, honored, cared for, loved, we know it...

And so... **'...how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'**

I came across a beautiful testimony shared by North Carolina Judge Jesse Caldwell who tells of a crowded hospital ER. A Vietnamese woman who was waiting her turn to be examined became aware of a frustrating "non-conversation" being attempted a few seats down in very broken English! A nurse was trying to ask a patient questions about her illness. The patient spoke Spanish. The nurse did not. She listened for a minute then realized that while she didn't speak Spanish she did understand the broken-English bits and phrases the Spanish speaking patient was offering as answers. Because of her own experience of learning to communicate in "broken English," the Vietnamese woman could hear what this other woman was trying to say. ***She offered to translate this into something the nurse could understand, and was so successful that the hospital actually eventually hired her as a kind of generic translator.*** Shared, compassionate brokenness & vulnerability is a common language understood by all foreign-speaking patients.

We live in a world where hard retribution seems to be our go-to tongue: “*You hurt me, and, after I smolder, my instinct is to look for an opportunity for how best to hurt you!*” I remember wincing as a young boy watching a WW2 documentary of Adolf Hitler reacting to the tragic August 1940 bombing of Berlin by the RAF. ‘...*the British drop two, three or four thousand kilos of bombs, then we will drop 150,000, 180,000, 230,000, 300,000 or 400,000 kilos, or more, in one night*’. ‘*If they declare that they will attack our cities on a large scale, we will utterly obliterate theirs!*’ⁱⁱ.

That’s invariably our go-to style. Exposed to any form of hurt or hate, our instinct is to hit back by escalating even more hurt and hate. But exposed to love and respect, again, that’s how we would tend to want to respond... It’s curious how neither of those responses are inevitable with how we respond actually remaining quite firmly in our hands. At Pentecost we are told that our reactionary language was invaded/pervaded by the infusing goodness of God’s impossibly inclusive love.

As we, like those Pentecost disciples are Spirit-given an awareness of all this as Christ-permeated/ as sacred-saturated - so that awareness is both winsome, and infectious. Remember how Margaret Mead wrote we should ‘*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; because indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*’ Starting with just those few gathered it quickly spilled over, out, and initiated a world movement that has quite literally changed the course of human history... This Pentecost-text describes us as Christ-followers – AT OUR BEST!

Scripture describes 3 great movements of God within creation, beginning...with (1) Creating God who began by creating everything good and soaked in sacred presence. It’s what some describe as God’s First Incarnation where the beauty of all this is somehow seen as expressing the purity and wonder of the Creator. But, for some reason, because we choose instead to look to just whatever our small selves decides is important, God sent us Jesus as the Word made flesh. (2) Jesus, then, as the Second Incarnation. Jesus comes as the physical Presence, the Teacher, Demonstrator, Revealer of the One God who is tangibly, physically with us... Jesus is ‘God with a Face’ ‘*whoever has seen me has seen God*’ⁱⁱⁱ, and then there’s this - the third movement (3) the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We may see this as the empowerment of our perception!

It’s only ever in and by and through God’s Holy Spirit that we ever get to see what God sees of creation, and are empowered to respond to it as God would have us respond. That **response makes all the difference!**

Writer, poet, Susan Noyes Anderson^{iv} wrote the following poem in 2009:

*No soul could ever walk this earth alone and still emerge believing, because
The fertile ground for faith is found in giving and receiving.
The love of Christ is ours to share but we must make that choice.
As we speak to another’s heart we hear the Saviour’s voice.
Each time we wipe a bitter tear, or smooth a furrowed brow,
We touch as much of godliness, as this world will allow.
When we strengthen feeble knees and lift the hands...hung down.
We reach beyond the dirt and thorns toward a heav’nly crown.
Our hope in Christ pours healing balm upon the suffering spirit.*

*We preach forgiveness and acceptance so that all might hear it.
And then holding up the wounded, we receive so much more than we give,
for when we put on charity, we change the way we live.
To care for saint or sinner is to wield the Savior's powers.
On earth, Christ's love must come through us. Christ has no hands but ours.*

May the Holy Spirit inspired words of our actions, the words of our hearts, come from this deepest place of holy knowing and seeing and then doing... And may others come to be blessed because of how even us – we – come to make Christ's presence clear and known in their lives...

***Dear God, Breathe, breathe on us now, To open God's mouth, And to speak the word that
heals. Oh, Spirit of God - Our Pentecost God - Breathe on us... Fill us with your love,
HELP US TO KNOW, HELP US TO GO...
Send us out with Your power O God
Spirit of God, in Jesus' Name
Amen.***

Rev Robin Jacobson

ⁱ See Genesis 11:1-9, describing how, as they were building this towering monument to themselves, they started babbling incoherently and fell out of relationship - nobody understanding anything!

ⁱⁱ <https://ww2today.com/4th-september-1940-hitler-declares-that-he-will-hit-back>

ⁱⁱⁱ As he said in John 14 to Philip

^{iv} Also a blogger who has also written books with wonderful titles such as *At the End of Your Rope, There's Hope*, & *Awaken Your Spiritual Power: The Fairy Godmother Isn't Coming!*,