

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt  
Day of Pentecost Observed - Year C  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b  
Romans 8:14-17  
John 14:8-17[25-27]  
06/05/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

8Philip said to [Jesus,] “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. 12Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. 15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. [25“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26But the

Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”] The Gospel of Our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Pentecost!**

Good morning! Years ago, when I first started to really get into reading, I discovered that I had an interesting problem. For all the books I read, it seemed that I was gifted with an uncanny ability to almost always incorrectly pronounce names and interesting words. Now, for most readers, this probably wouldn't be that big of a problem, but for someone who read only fantasy novels, it was disastrous. If you've never read a fantasy novel, just know that every author tries to create unique spellings of common names along with brand new words with strange accents that seem solely created to perplex readers like me. I remember pronouncing the Harry Potter character Hermione as “Hermonya,” and I'm still not sure how I got there. When I took French in high school and college the problem became more apparent, and by the time I got to seminary and was taking Greek, it was glaringly obvious.

And so, it is with some jealousy that I read the Pentecost story every year and hear that “*And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.*”<sup>1</sup> Can you imagine how much easier it would be if we could all go

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:6 NRSV

around with universal translators, making languages so much more understandable. I mean, I would probably still get the pronunciation wrong, but I imagine that it would help!

Pentecost is the focus of this day. Our Gospel reading probably sounds familiar, because we've been hitting different sections of it throughout Eastertide, but today it is used to help point back to our first reading. In Acts of the Apostles 2:1-21 we read of the miracle and fantastical story that is Pentecost. Michael Jenkins writes that *“the text startles us with a scene of almost unimaginable liveliness verging on chaos: sound like the rush of a mighty wind filled the whole house; tongues of fire appeared among the people; and as the crowd was filled with the Spirit of God, they spoke a cacophony of languages.”*<sup>2</sup> The story is so incredible, that it can be simple to get caught up in trying to understand the “how,” rather than the more important question of “what does it mean?” The famous preaching professor and scholar William H. Willimon helps keep us in lane, wiring *“we are not inquiring into the truth as facticity—truth as to what happened. Rather, we are concerned about truth as to what is claimed—what is asserted in the story about the nature of this community. In reading the Pentecost account in the second chapter of Acts, we are part of an author’s struggle to bring to reality something of the truth about the church, something which cannot be known except by this story. Therefore we shall pass over questions that might interest us; we must let the story have its way with us.”*<sup>3</sup> I like that last line... “we must let the story have its way with us.” And I love that he acknowledges the desire to be caught up in the fantastical parts of the story. It’s so crazy! How can we not ask

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<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 3.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Willimon, William H. *Acts.* Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 29.

questions! But no, we'll do what Willimon points out, letting the story work its way into our souls.

Pentecost, that celebration in the church that happens 50 days after the empty tomb, has often been called the Church's birthday. It's one of the two Sundays (along with Reformation Sunday in October) that we get to wear red. And every year we hear the same story. Unlike Easter where we hear different versions of the same event, on Pentecost we read Acts 2:1-21 every year. Because of this, the story can act like the strength of a wave, consistently and relentlessly washing over us year after year. So, Willimon's advice becomes possible, as we ponder the story that is often credited as the beginning of the Christian Church.

So, what does this story tell us? If we truly are witnessing the beginning of the Christianity, something that would eventually be called "the Way" in Acts, what can we learn from it?

What we see is a restoration of what was broken. We are given glimpses of two major events from the stories in Genesis. The first is a connection between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the upper room and with the disciples and at the very beginning of time when God's breath called creation into being. One scholar writes that "*things are coming loose, breaking open. Can it be the same wind which on the very first morning of all mornings swept across dark waters, the wind of creation?*"<sup>4</sup> This same event also points forward, reminding us that just as the Holy Spirit was active in the beginning, during the ministry of Jesus Christ, and was present at Pentecost, so too do we benefit from the activity of the Holy Spirit, always soaring through the church breathing new life and direction.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

Pentecost also draws a connection with the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel. In humanity's hubris, we tried to build a tower into the sky, scorning God's direction and wisdom. And so as the tower collapsed we saw the breakdown of communication, a tale that helps us understand the creation of so many different languages. But here at Pentecost we are given a vision of a church that, while it speaks in different languages, is united in understanding!

One of the things that I love about this story is that we finally see the disciples start to get it right. Through all four Gospels we are shown a group of believers who consistently get things wrong. They mess up time and time again. But over the 50 days of Easter they spend time with Jesus learning and growing, correcting their understanding. For someone like me, who gets it wrong so often, it gives me hope that I too can get it right!

In the Pentecost story God is telling all of us that we can learn, that we can grow. God shows us a vision of a community that united in its goal and is still able to hold up the uniqueness and differences of each member. God shows us that the Holy Spirit hasn't given up on us, and that God is calling us to continue in the amazing work that Jesus Christ started. So... are you ready? Amen.