

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday, May 28th, 2023

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I love the color red; I think most people when they meet me can reasonably guess that red is easily my favorite color. So... I obviously have always liked Pentecost ever since I was a child. I remember going to my family's church in Alexandria and seeing the two-story tall cross we had in the sanctuary draped in red cloth and all the other liturgical colors in the sanctuary matching it.

But lately, I've been having a chicken-egg situation on why red is my favorite color and why I liked Pentecost so much when I was little. Did I like Pentecost because of the color red or did I first start to like red because I saw it on Pentecost? After all in a child's mind if Jesus loved the color red, then I must love it too.

The color red either way spoke to me as a kid. I remember paying extra attention to the boring sermons waiting to hear a small tidbit about the color red, and as a result, I started to learn more

about the faith my family proclaimed, and gain interest in the message of grace our scriptures teach us. All because of the color red.

When we read our scripture today we hear of a pretty awesome scene where fiery red tongues come down onto the disciples from the sky and seemingly grants them the ability to be heard and understood in all the native languages of those who were present to witness this miraculous event. We depict this scene with the color red, to remind us of that event and the fiery presence of the Holy Spirit as it descended on the disciples.

The color red when I was young helped me visualize this scene from our scripture today, to really cement it into my mind and even if I did not quite understand what it meant in my youth, it felt important to me and sparked that desire to learn more about it as I got older.

And what I have learned in all my years of loving the color red is that verbal language is not the only way the spirit connects with us.

There is a subtext in the Holy Spirit that when either spoken, written, signed, or read connects all of humanity in a much deeper way that is difficult to explain.

There's a story I like to tell on Pentecost about my tattoos and the day I got my forearm tattoo and the deep religious conversation I had with my tattoo artist the day of Pentecost four years ago when this tattoo was applied.

Fun fact, the same questions your dentist asks you while they are digging in your mouth, "What do you do for a living, where's your next vacation?" etc..... These are the same questions your tattoo artist asks when they are digging a needle into your skin. And I promise it's just as hard to answer those questions through clenched teeth as it is with a mouth full of dental equipment.

But this guy when he found out what I did for a living and how I was studying to be a Pastor immediately opened up and had a million and one questions about the church, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God, and everything else about Christianity. And me being his

willing victim and stuck in his chair I couldn't really avoid answering his questions, and it also took my mind off the whole painful process.

As our conversation progressed I learned more about him, his faith, his history, his conflicts with the church, his hopes for his family and their faith, and eventually (I guess because it was a slow day in the shop) other artists started to join in on our conversation as they poked their heads into his office.

Some were drawn in from overhearing our talk and others because as they looked in they noticed other tattoos on my skin that they in this shop that I frequented had dug into my skin themselves, and the conversation we were having is what inspired them to stay until my current round of torture was over.

Just like the color red when I was a child there was something about our mutual connection of tattoos that sparked our conversation and allowed us to invite the Holy Spirit to join in on our conversation, and that invitation grew into more than just a friendly

conversation between two individuals, it sprouted into a moment where those who had questions in that office could feel almost a pull to join in, ask their questions and listen to the answers. That thing, the force that drew them in, that is the Holy Spirit's subtext that I said earlier is difficult to explain, but drives our daily lives and connects us all with one another.

When the disciples stood up and were seen to be speaking multiple languages at once, there were questions from the crowd to understand what exactly was happening. And it is in this act of asking questions, of engaging with the disciples and inviting the Holy Spirit into their conversation, through that simple act of asking questions, that we see the foundation of our church begin.

Because the disciples were not given an order from the Holy Spirit to start a crusade, to put themselves against a great enemy of the faith, but rather the only thing they were given was the ability to talk to those whom they were sent to. To share the message of God's grace given to us through Christ's sacrifice without that barrier of

language to separate us from one another. Showing us further that this subtext of the Holy Spirit is what connects all of us together, reaching out through the grace that Christ blessed all of us with in order to guide us to help serve one another with love and understanding in ways that make it difficult for us to always communicate effectively.

And when that communication breaks down, or is ignored, then we start to waver from the path God intends for the world. Because when we ignore one another and don't let the Holy Spirit guide our interactions to help and comprehend what is happening in our world and in each other's lives, then we start to have conflict and struggles that the Holy Spirit is there to help us avoid at first and repair when we falter.

What do I mean by communication breakdown? I'll explain it to you with a funny story. Many people here might have heard that my wife and I had our anniversary this week. What many of you don't know is that about a month ago we had a little argument over our

anniversary and my lack of preparation for it. After all it was a month away and my wife and I agreed that for our fifth-year anniversary we were going to do something fun, like go out of town on a vacation or have a party or something. Then as the days ticked down my wife wanted to know what plans I had made for this big occasion in our lives since it was a month away and she had to pack and plan for travel.

In my confusion I asked her why she was getting so worked up over this anniversary specifically. To which she reminded me because we agreed to do something big for our fifth. I then asked her what year we were married and what year it was currently and to do a little math. To which I watched her count to four on her fingers and stop. Then in our laughter at the misunderstanding we proceeded to have a wonderful date night this past Thursday filled with dancing and music to celebrate our fourth anniversary.

The connection the Holy Spirit brings into our lives works in very much the same way. When the crowds gathered around the

disciples and asked what was happening to the disciples and if they were drunk. It was Peter who stood before them and explained what was happening, offering clarification, answering their questions, and showing the power of the Holy Spirit to cross boundaries like language and misunderstandings in order for us to understand and love one another on a level that is much deeper than just mere words. And when we forget or refuse to communicate with one another as the Spirit intends and those conflicts happen, just like the argument with my wife, the Spirit gives us the nudge we need to come back to one another in love, compassion, understanding, and sometimes laughter like in our case.

Christ's story gave us the tools we needed to serve our God and to serve one another faithfully with love and compassion. Here though in our readings today we see how the Holy Spirit guides and shows us how we are to best use those tools of grace because

even something as simple as a hammer can be used wrong if someone is not taught first how to use it.

The Holy Spirit showed the disciples how to use that grace from Christ in connecting them with all the people of the world and breaking down the barrier of language to show how the good news of God's love and grace is available for the whole world and all who listen to it, not just a select few who speak a preferred language.

The Holy Spirit is what helps us to transcend the boundaries that to this day still keep us apart. Things like politics, societal views, economic disparity, social class, and an infinite number of irrelevant things. But the spirit helps us overcome the boundaries we put up in our lives, so that we can live the way God intends us to, for each other.

So, today we celebrate the beginning of the Christian movement that has its roots traced back to this moment of red fire descending onto the disciples, remember that Pentecost is more than just a pretty color. It is a reminder of what the Holy Spirit

showed us in our readings today. That the love God has for us transcends our imaginary borders, and helps us climb over walls and up cliffs, because nothing should separate us from one another, because we are connected forever by Christ's deeds, and showing him our thanks by going over those barricades in order to serve our neighbors and show each other the same love that Christ showed the entire world on the cross. Amen.