

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Pentecost Sunday - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 37:1-14 (alternate)

Psalms 104:24-34, 35b

Acts 2:1-21 (alternate)

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

05/19/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said,] 26“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. 16:4b“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. 12“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me,

because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

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

Pentecost!

Good morning! I wasn't there to witness the tale, but it goes something like this: One evening my brother was home alone and bored. Let me be clear, my brother and I were always at our most dangerous when we were bored. Un-intelligent teenage boys with nothing to do could topple governments. He didn't believe that a paper towel would catch fire THAT quickly, and so as he hovered over a lit candle with a paper towel he was caught a little off guard as it very quickly burst into flames in his hands. Fortunately, he was very close to the half-bath on the first floor and so he rushed into the room and dropped the burning paper into the bathroom toilet. The rush of moving across the room only made the flames burn higher and so by the time he dropped it into the toilet he had a burning ball of fire that he cast like a wizard from his hands. The fire burned for a few more seconds as he frantically flushed the toilet. I'm told that as he ran, small bits of burning paper flew around his head and body. But as the flames died down, the damage was done. The small fire had gotten black soot all over the toilet, and even after a great deal of scrubbing and cleaning it was only minimally removed. Whenever I think of the chaos of Pentecost, I am reminded of the very real chaos my brother felt all those years ago. Fortunately for the disciples, the tongues of flame from the Spirit that descended only SEEM like fire, and are in fact not the real thing.

Pentecost is such a great church holiday. Along with Reformation Sunday, it is one of only two regular services throughout the year that we wear red. The color signifies the movement of the Holy Spirit in this very lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. This is why you will also see it worn at ordination services for new pastors and deacons. Pentecost is a special day. It is often called the “birthday of the church,” because it is here where we see a rush of activity that spurs the disciples forward into the mission that God had called them to do.

But Pentecost is more than moving forward. As one scholar points out, *“Pentecost is a looking back— a building on the past. The story starts with Jesus’ disciples gathered ‘together in one place’ to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost. The Jews among them likely believed they knew what was about to unfold; after all, this was a familiar communal celebration. Hellenistic Jews gave the name “Pentecost” (literally, “fiftieth”) to the Jewish “Festival of Weeks” (Shevuot), which occurred 50 days after Passover. Originally a harvest festival, Pentecost eventually celebrated the giving of the Mosaic Law.”*¹

So on a day of heavy significance, 50 days after the Passover, and 50 days after Jesus’ crucifixion, something amazing happens. We have been talking for several months now about what faithful waiting looks like, and so I can imagine that we feel for the disciples in the anxiety of that task. But in the midst of that waiting, when I am sure they were frustrated and tired of waiting in Jerusalem, *“suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue*

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/day-of-pentecost-2/commentary-on-acts-21-21-17>

rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”²

Now, scholars and preachers have spent years digging into the nuances and speculation of what that event looked like, but I think it’s safe to say that something astounding happened, so astounding that as Norm pointed out Monday, people across the whole city heard the noise. Imagine what it was like the first time you heard a plane from Langley Air Force Base take off across the city.

But the strangeness of the experience doesn’t stop there. Soon the disciples start speaking, and the guests around them understand what they’re saying. These uneducated fishermen and farmers from Galilee speak and are understood by people in their very own language! Think of how amazing that is! The text specifically does NOT say that all people understand one spoken language, but instead each and every individual tongue is honored and represented. And it doesn’t just stop with local spoken dialects either! Some of the groups that are named in the text have been dead and gone for hundreds of years. The writer of the Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that this is an experience that transcends all of time and space!

Here’s the catch. Seeing and hearing isn’t enough to believe. Just as one of the bystanders remarks that they are just drunk, apparently it did not dissuade all doubt. It’s here that we get one of my favorite little details in all of scripture. Like a good Lutheran Peter points out that it’s impossible for the disciples to be drunk, not because it couldn’t happen, but because it’s only 9 in the morning! We are then given a powerful recounting of a vision from the Hebrew prophet Joel who concludes his vision with that

² Acts 2:2-4 NRSV

wonderful line “*then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”³

But as I said, there’s a catch. Not everyone believes. Seeing and hearing are not enough. Witnessing God’s work will not spur all to action and belief. Some are frozen in fear, some blind by anger. Others are lifeless and dead. Which is where Ezekiel comes in!

In our first reading we hear a spectacular story from the prophet Ezekiel. He is shown a vision of a valley of dry bones. Maybe the site of an ancient and massive battle? If you’re a *Lord of the Rings* fan, think of the Dead Marshes without the water. Regardless of what happened, the thing that is clear is that there is NO life in this place. And yet, that doesn’t stop God. With just a few words the prophet witnesses these dead and lifeless bones be put back together, not like a zombie, but given new flesh and the literal breath of life! God breathes a new beginning into these bones that had no life. We are told that these bones represent Israel, a people lost and confused in a time of great upheaval and change. But God knows that life is still possible, just as the breath of life brought change and newness to the disciples 2,000 years ago, and now, here in this place too, God sends the Holy Spirit to breathe change and life into a people who may think that nothing more could happen. The only question for you is this: Do you hear that rushing wind? Amen.

³ Acts 2:21 NRSV