

The Day of Pentecost Year B 2024
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
May 19, 2024
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Act 2: 1-21

Psalms 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8:22-27

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

JE, congratulations. Thank you for sharing a bit of yourself with us, not just today, with your courage to speak to us, but in growing up here, being your Mom's helper, showing up throughout your life, even when you're here because Mom said so. Sometimes, that's why we're here, too. We, too, at every age, are just trying to figure out life; thank you for growing with us. We celebrate with you the work you have completed and the life you now begin.

The church often celebrates Pentecost as the birthday of the church. Pentecost is sort of that, and the day initiates much more. Pentecost is the complete reversal of the story of the tower of Babel. You may remember this story; we find it in Genesis 11. This is the time after the Flood, and everyone, "the whole world," had one language. When the Israelites came to a certain place, they settled, made bricks out of clay and mortar out of bitumen. Then, as the Rev. Amy Richter writes (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/speaking-with-strangers-day-of-pentecost-b-2012/>):

But the people decided to make a name for themselves. They were tired of trusting in God, and they weren't all that good at it anyway. They were tired of letting God be the source of their security and identity, so they decided to build a city, and in the middle of that city they would build a tower reaching up to the heavens and bring themselves some fame. God heard about this plan and said, "This is not good."

Why do you suppose this tower was not good? It is preposterous to think that we can build a tower "up to the heavens" and put ourselves on par with God. The people's plans are arrogant and self-serving. Their plans are also (oddly) funny: bitumen is a tar-like substance and it is waterproof. The people waterproof the tower *just in case* God decides to flood the world again. It's laughable, and sad. God essentially says, "no;" I have a plan; I will build not a tower but a people who will show the way to connect with and serve God. God punishes by scattering them in geography and language; they can no longer communicate and work together. In Babel, they worked to create a name for themselves; what might such a unity create on behalf of God?

Pentecost shows us that God isn't "up," but right in the middle of us. We cannot outrun, out build, or every be out of God's care. We celebrate Pentecost as God's giving of the Holy Spirit, not only to the 11 apostles, or to the 120 in the gathered crowd of last week, but of the thousands of people of different nations and languages who are together in Jerusalem. The gift of the Holy Spirit is poured onto everyone – everyone has a flame dancing over their heads. No distinction; three thousand people were baptized and received the Holy Spirit that day. God in Christ and the Holy Spirit is a miracle that will not be hidden. Everyone saw those flames, heard and felt that roaring wind. There was no way of mistaking this new day and its gift and power.

Today we come together and speak the language of prayer. In prayer, baptism, community, and the Eucharist, we gather to take in Christ. And, while we are separated in time from the apostles and from the crowds in Jerusalem, we are not at separated from their situation. We, like the ancient followers of The Way, continue to discern what a life of faith together looks like without the physical person of Jesus in our midst. We find Jesus in one another, and become the hands and feet of Christ in the world today. We cannot go up to God, for God has come to us in God's son Jesus and now, in the Holy Spirit. God's kingdom is inaugurated on earth, and God's advocate, the Holy Spirit, is among us, upon us.

Peter reminds us, with words of the ancient prophet Joel, what Pentecost at its completion looks like. How appropriate that Joel writes that our sons and daughters have a role. We do, too. Our sons and our daughters, our

young people and our old people dare to speak words of God and dare to dream big dreams. JE, and all who are gathered, dream big. Then dream bigger.

We pray that all creatures will renew God's creation in accordance with God's will. May we speak the one language of God's kingdom. In God's kingdom, we have no words for experiences of racial hatred and outrage, of murders and looting and rioting, because those experiences are unknown. We cannot imagine that one day children had to go through active shooter training in school. God's children are no longer murdered in classrooms, marathons, nightclubs, and malls. We have no picture in our heads and hearts of smoke billowing from the towers we have made, or the rubble remaining when they fall. Words for people with no home, with no food, or destroyed by our many inhumanities against one another have fallen out of use. We know the words only from the ancient chronicles of this day.

We carry in us, in our faith, the deep hope that the world needs. "We have the first fruits of creation" through the Holy Spirit, and that same Spirit prays on our behalf "with sighs too deep for words." Paul, in his letter to the Romans writes that in this life we wait for the eventual redemption of our bodies. While we wait for the saving grace of our Lord, we have that saving through the Holy Spirit. We are already saved. Throughout our lifetime, we grow into God's grace, already given.

From the Book of Common Prayer that we pick up so often: "The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ." We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation." In other words, we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we stop being strangers with God and all that God creates.

While JE figures out what's ahead, and as we take that journey at any age, John Henry Newman's words may help. The words are for all of us. "I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created. ... God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission ... Somehow I am necessary for his purposes, as necessary in my place as an archangel in his ..." St. John Henry Newman, *Everyday Meditations*

Friends, let us pray.

Come, O Holy Spirit.

Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,

come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within,

come as Holy Light and lead us in the darkness,

come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,

come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,

come as Holy Life and dwell in us.

Convict us, convert us, consecrate us,

until we are set free from the service of ourselves,

to be your servants to the world. Amen.