

Sermon Pentecost 2022 C

What I love about the reading we heard from Acts in our first lesson today is that it is about ordinary men (sorry ladies it does not seem to include you but maybe pretend it does as women were not able to be on a par with men 2000 years ago as you know.) These ordinary men were suddenly given amazing powers, as though a Messiah miracle descended on each of them, and each became like a Superman. That is what Pentecost is all about, transformation. It is the transformation of ordinary men into extraordinary ones. It was also for the whole group of men. Each member of the group received the same power, the same opportunity to be a new person, the same transformation. Wham: suddenly they all were enveloped in the power of the Holy Spirit. What an amazing scene. We speak of Messiah miracles; this was a huge miracle. I have not seen Hollywood try and emulate it, but maybe it has. The whole group of the disciples, gathered in a room together, were all empowered. They must have felt a power had just landed upon them but at the same time realized it had landed upon everyone in the room. It seemed that no one had any more or any less of it. They could see that a tongue of fire was resting on each of them, and all realized that were filled with the Holy Spirit (even if they did not use that terminology on that day.) This is another miracle you can note. The miracles go on. The next was that each of them could speak in other languages, different ones. This was going to be important when they hurtled themselves into the Jerusalem marketplace. You need to note that it was festival time in Jerusalem, the harvest feast time, Pentecost. Many Jews would have journeyed to Jerusalem for the festival. Thus, when we hear that there are all these people from different regions and countries it is what we would expect. What surprised the crowd of visitors is that they all understood what Jesus disciples were saying as they started evangelizing. A cacophony of language, that is why we invited people with the ability to read in another language to do so. I am hoping the disciples distributed themselves around the city so that only they could each be heard by a specific group, otherwise it would have been rather chaotic to say the least! People hearing in their own languages was the next miracle of the day. People of different races, maybe different colors too were included in this amazing early morning ministry. Welcoming and including people was honored 2000 years ago, but it is not the same in our racist world today. Thinking about different people and their experiences, I share a part of Maya Angelou's poem, "On the Pulse of Morning."

So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheik,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.

History, despite its wrenching pain
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

Back to the disciples, they were each empowered by gifts of the Holy Spirit and were using them. The final miracle from that reading was that Peter felt sufficiently empowered to deliver a great sermon; using words and ideas that resonated with his hearers. You will need to open a Bible at Acts chapter 2 to read the whole sermon; only a small portion is included in today's reading. I feel a bit envious as he obviously did not spend a lot of time preparing his sermon, but I know I am not willing to risk arriving completely unprepared to speak to you all.

Peter spoke out. He spoke words on his heart and mind. The past two weeks people have been speaking out in horror at hearing about the 19 children shot dead in Uvalde Texas as well as those shot dead in Buffalo and in Tulsa. I feel outraged at such brutality. I am aware that for the 10 years from 1994 – 2004 when assault weapons were banned there were far fewer mass shootings. Since the ban was lifted the numbers have multiplied greatly. I do not understand why ordinary citizens, not at war, need military style weapons in their homes. But I know guns are very much a political issue. However, the deaths of so many innocent people including 19 young children is a terrible sin and stain on our nation's conscience.

What also was apparent in the shooting at Buffalo, is that the collective sins of our nation; the racism that is still so present, the prejudice against different groups which keeps rearing its ugly head, are sins which our nation retains because people perpetuate both of them. It will take each person realizing they hold these sins in their hearts and renounce them before we can all feel that sense of release and God's forgiveness. Will our nation ever be at that stage? We all need to recognize that each person is made in the image of God, different in every way but each of us is part of God's wonderful and intentionally diverse creation. As St Paul reminded us in the Epistle reading today, each person is a child of God, each of us adopted into God's family with no exceptions.

But racism has been on our hearts and minds for years. For the past two years people have been speaking out in horror at seeing, yes seeing, George Floyd killed by a police officer in Minneapolis. I still feel outraged at such brutality. Sadly, we know this was not the first such incident in Minnesota. I feel anguish. What sort of people are we that continue to let such things happen? Will we change how we train our police? Or is it just a few of the officers who are brutal? There have been too many deaths which sadly are race related. The Black Lives' Matter movement has certainly continued to bring a major awareness of racism to the fore the whole of this past year. It is nearly 8 years since Michael Brown was killed on August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. We need to ask ourselves how we are moving forward to exterminate the sin of racism in our nation, our leaders, our police, and in ourselves.

Today we also see creation suffering. Has it always been so? Have people throughout history treated creation as badly as recent generations and ours is currently doing? I recently read this piece Hildegard of Bingen from 1000 years ago. She wrote:

Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.
Gaze at the beauty of Earth's greenings.

Now, think.

All nature is at the disposal of humankind.

We are to work with it.

For without it we cannot survive.

She is so right; we do need to work with nature, another word for creation. If we are God's adopted children then we need to do what all family members do, we need to work together for the good of all the family. There is much that God is calling us to do to make a difference so that the future generations will have a home on this planet Earth. St Paul goes on to say in this chapter from his letter to the Romans, that we know we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Referring to the Holy Spirit, he wrote, "that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." You can know that the Holy Spirit is here to help you with all the challenges of your life; I hope those words give you good comfort and a feeling of support, reminding you that you are not alone in your struggles.

Jesus had already told his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit, or the "Advocate" as our Gospel said it. The words Jesus spoke are words of both warning and encouragement. He is speaking to his disciples before he began the horror of his final hours before his brutal death. He is with them in the upper room after they had shared the Last Supper together. He gave them the bad news that he was going to leave them followed by the good news that they would not be without help, guidance, and support. Jesus then offered them his gift of peace, peace in their hearts, peace in their minds, peace in their souls. Just think about this. What does it feel like to have a real sense of peace flowing through you? I invite you to reflect today on accepting Christ's gift of peace in your heart and mind.

Today as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday. I hope you will thank God for this day and for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I close with words of theologian Fred Buechner," Go forth into the world knowing that there are words of hope and healing which will never be said unless you say them and deeds of compassion and caring which will never be done unless you do them.

Amen.

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