

PENTECOST SUNDAY, June 9, 2019, Year C

- "... they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house... Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."
- **We have a challenge imagining this moment.** Because our culture emphasizes the *particularity* of *personal* experience and our *differences*, rather than *what is shared* between us. We hear talk about diversity and inclusion, which *might* reflect a positive regard for community. But it may also reflect an assumption that, *apart from our efforts* to bring people together, we are *separate* and *disconnected*. *Perhaps, on the day of Pentecost, some people dramatically experienced God's power. Yet, we may be surprised to hear that ALL of them did, together!*
- The reason we may be surprised is not hard to discern. **We don't appreciate how community is vital to individual human flourishing.** We often want freedom for ourselves without personal accountability to others. And, we desire private opportunities without public responsibilities. Being in community with other people may seem to be occasionally beneficial, especially when it is on our terms. But we tend *not* to see it as essential to our lives.
- Evangelical Christians *rightly emphasize a personal relationship with God*, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And many in the broader Catholic tradition *rightly point to how we grow in our relationship with God through community*. So, we may then think of this as *an either/or choice*. Yet, the New Testament treats our relationship with God as *both* personal *and* communal. *Scripture encourages us to see how God is at work nurturing the lives of particular persons as well as transforming the health of whole communities.*

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- We have lost at least one insight by moving from the King James translation to modern versions of the Bible. It centers on the difference between “*ye*” and “*you*.” Except in the south, in modern American English, we *don’t distinguish* between *you*, plural, and *you*, singular. And so, when Jesus says, in the King James version of Mt. 5:48, “*be ye perfect*,” the contemporary NRSV translation has it as simply, “*be perfect...*” In other words, “*you, be perfect!*” A modern ‘southern’ translation would say, “*y’all be perfect*,” making clear that Jesus is *not just speaking to individuals*.
- This can help us notice a *paradox*. We know how Episcopalians and other mainline Protestant Christians are sometimes uncomfortable when our brothers and sisters in Christ talk about ‘*accepting Jesus as our personal savior*.’ And yet, *many of us along with other ‘mainline Christians’ assume that religion is always a personal and private matter*. In other words, *both evangelical and non-evangelical Christians often make the same assumption*, that our faith is *largely private*, even if we *don’t speak about it differently from each other*.
- All this is important to remember *today*. *This is because the feast of Pentecost, just like the feast of the Resurrection, is first about community before it is about individual members of that community*. The fact that we are baptized *into the Body of our Lord* is directly related to the way we begin our worship at every service of Baptism:

*There is one Body and one Spirit; There is one hope in God’s call to us;
One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; One God and Father of all.*

- In other words, *in our personal subjective experience*, we may encounter *multiple ways* of seeing the Lord, *differing ways* of understanding the Faith, and *varying ways* of living into our Baptism. **Yet, there is only One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism into the One Body of Christ, which is the Church.**

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- On this day, we commemorate **how the One Spirit came down upon the diverse members of the community that Jesus enabled and restored within the Covenant, uniting many peoples in a common life with a common purpose.** Therefore, we focus on how we flourish together in community. We flourish together in a community whose ongoing practice and experience signifies an entrance into the most profound kind of relationship that we know: relationship as we experience it within God's own life.
- Here is the question we need to ask ourselves: *On which understanding of human persons and the role of community will we base our life decisions? Will we be guided by the overlapping witness of Scripture and the early Church, as well as our rites of Baptism and Eucharist? Or, will we complacently accept the assumptions of the culture around us?*
- **In one understanding,** we live as *individuals* except when **we choose to come together in relationships and in community.** We have *occasional* experiences of God, piercing the apparent distance between us and the divine presence. And we might from time to time receive *moments* of personal revelation and inspiration, which get us through the barren stretches in between. Either way, some are more blessed than others, in having these experiences of community and of inspiration.
- **But in the ancient biblical understanding, we are created in community, and we are redeemed in community.** Whether we experience it or not, after Baptism **God abidingly dwells between us and within us.** There is no distance between us and God, even if we perceive a disconnection from God within ourselves. Whether we are conscious of it or not, **God always pours out self to us in revelation and in inspiration.** This is why God encourages us *to open ourselves in prayer to the Spirit's abundant gifts.*

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- At both Baptism and Confirmation, at Marriage and at Ordination, we promise to support those who are making covenant commitments. This means that *we promise to be involved relationally in each other's lives*. This is *not an option* that some might choose, but *God's expectation for all of us*. Just as we are all given the Holy Spirit, we are called to build up the Body of Christ.
- Created in the image and likeness of God, we are *subjects*, not *objects*. *We cannot really know ourselves, but can only be known in a relationship with others*. As 1st John reminds us, *we love because God first loved us*.¹ We experience ourselves as *known and loved* by the Holy Spirit, and by others in the same Spirit.
- Everyone who is baptized, and all those baptized today across the world, become part of *God's Spirit-created community*. For gentiles and others, God's community has ancient roots ~ roots in God's covenant with Creation; in God's covenant with Noah and again with all of Creation; with God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah, and all their descendants; in God's covenant with Moses and Israel, at Sinai, and with all their descendants; and –through all this– God's covenant with all who will come to him, through the Messiah. *For all who are baptized are fully a part of the Church, and full members of Christ's Body, in which all have received the same plentiful measure of the Holy Spirit*. As we grow in wisdom and wonder, *we are one-with-another* as full communicants at the same altar. We are conscious of how our community is blessed - *we are blessed when others become one with us in the Church*. **God is at work within and among us!** God is powerfully at work through this community, and in the lives of every one of us!

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Bonnie Van Voorst, *Pentecost*

At the bottom of the painting, blues, browns, and greens represent humanity. Above, blue, gold, and red symbolize the Trinity—blue for Christ's immanence, gold for the Father's transcendence, and red for the work of the Holy Spirit. "And the Father, as he had promised, gave [Jesus] the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today." (Acts 2:33) The red descends to earth, settling on God's people as they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

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Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
 and your young men shall see visions,
 and your old men shall dream dreams.
 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
 and they shall prophesy.
 And I will show portents in the heaven above
 and signs on the earth below,
 blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
 The sun shall be turned to darkness
 and the moon to blood,
 before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "

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The Readings for this day:

Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9

Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Notes:

¹ 1 John 4:19.