

June 5, 2022 - Pentecost Sunday - Sermon notes

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17,25-27

It was a relatively small group of people who had gathered in a quiet and private room in the midst of a festival. They were there following the instructions from their leader who told them to wait and pray. In just about two months this group had been through a tremendous series of events which would shape them and the work they had to do for the rest of their lives. First, it was the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. In fulfilment of a prophecy by Zechariah their master had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey to shouts of “Hosanna”. This event was followed, in surprisingly quick succession, with the arrest of their leader and his death at the hands of the Roman government. From the high point of the entrance into Jerusalem to the lowest of low points at the crucifixion all in a few short days. Perhaps you have experienced some times like that. And then, after only two days of mourning they were thrust once again to a high point with the news that Jesus had been raised from the dead and the inner circle had actually met with him in person. Then 40 some days later Jesus once again left them, this time ascending into heaven, with a promise to ‘never leave them nor forsake them’. This seemed to be a strange kind of promise from someone who disappeared from their view but they were told to wait and pray for the answer to this puzzle. If they had remembered his messages just prior to the crucifixion their waiting may have been easier and perhaps, over the period of time they were in prayer, these memories re-surfaced. In any case 120 disciples were in that upper room when the answer came in dramatic fashion.

Now, after all that Jesus was able to accomplish and the hundreds, if not thousands, of people he helped you might have expected more than 120 people to be gathered in this important prayer meeting but that relatively small number was about to explode. The 11 apostles along with the rest of the disciples were swept up in a wind from God and blessed with a gift that drew the attention of the pilgrims who were in Jerusalem for the prescribed festival of Pentecost. The pilgrims were there in obedience to the instructions which Moses had received and Jesus’ disciples gave them a different reason to rejoice. We are told that the early morning (it was 9 o’clock) event resulted in about 3,000 new believers who were added to their number and these were from all across the Roman Empire. From exultation to mourning to rejoicing to puzzlement to the filling of the Holy Spirit these disciples of Jesus had been through it all and they were now equipped with God’s Holy Spirit to be sent out into the world in witness to the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah of God. The rest of the book of Acts

follows Peter, Paul, Barnabus, and Luke through the years following as a representative sample of what God was doing through the disciples who had gathered in obedience to watch, pray, and wait.

God used this event to draw attention to his work in the world and grant a golden opportunity to the disciples of Jesus to proclaim the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus. Whatever we might have learned or heard about the Holy Spirit we are asked, through the readings assigned for today, to focus our attention on a particular aspects of the Spirit's work in our midst.

First let me draw your attention to the fact that divisions such as language barriers were overcome through the work of the Holy Spirit. In a very dramatic way God signaled that language need no longer be something which impedes unity and cooperation. God, through the outpouring of the Spirit, gave the ability to speak in other tongues to these disciples of Jesus. This, it seems, did not convey to the disciples an understanding of the foreign language - they may have felt that they were speaking in their native tongue - but communication occurred nonetheless. What we learn from this is that part of the Holy Spirit's work (perhaps a very large part) is communication between God and humanity and a small thing like a language difference does not stop God's work.

The second thing to notice is that the Holy Spirit also empowers communication by inspiring speakers with a message. Jesus once told his disciples not to worry about what they were to say when confronted by those who would arrest them and he told them that the "Holy Spirit would teach you what to say". Certainly Peter is an example of this - a fisherman untrained in public speaking delivers a message under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which has a tremendous impact on the listeners. Once again clear communication is part of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The third thing I wish to point out is that the Holy Spirit's work of communication is also given to the disciple in the internal conversations between themselves and God. Jesus said, "the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The way in which we learn and grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus said is through the work of God's Holy Spirit.

Of course, the Holy Spirit manifests itself in many other ways and some of those ways are quite spectacular but from what I read in the passages for today it seems that communication is one of the Spirit's most common tasks and what an important task it is. We need to have clear communication with God, with our neighbours, and with ourselves if we are to love them with our hearts and minds. A breakdown in communication is often the cause of a breakdown in relationships and that is what the

Holy Spirit is very effective in preventing and helping to correct when it happens. In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul spends a great deal of time helping his readers understand the work of the Holy Spirit in communication. He writes, for instance, 'likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words'. When we can't find the proper words the Holy Spirit helps provide them - particularly when we are praying. In the verses we heard today another form of communication is highlighted. "When we cry, Abba! Father! it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God". The confirmation that we have been adopted into the family of God is communicated to us through the Holy Spirit. Communication is the Holy Spirit's speciality and I give thanks to God for that.

Philip wanted Jesus to show them the Father and Jesus basically said that the way they would come to know the Father was through the Holy Spirit. The way in which Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him is also through the work of the Holy Spirit - the communication between the Father and Son happens through the agency of the Holy Spirit. That gift is promised to all who come to believe and we are encouraged to ask for that gift and open it when it comes.

As we celebrate the feast of Pentecost may we also give thanks for the gift of God's Spirit and learn how to grow in our understanding and appreciation for the communication which the Holy Spirit fosters, supports, and creates.

"Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in us the power of your love."