

Pentecost Year C 2019

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17

St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth 09/06/2019

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Grace and peace to you blessed saints from Father God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit. Today I want to give the day of Pentecost some OT context by adding the alternate first reading from Genesis 11:1-9, 'The Tower of Babel':

*"Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." Let's pray:*

We don't usually associate Pentecost with firing bricks, building ourselves a stairway to heaven, and making a name for ourselves.

What comes to mind when you think about Pentecost? Do you recall the story of the disciples gathered in the upper room? Do you hear a sound like the rush of violent wind filling the house? Do you picture divided tongues, as of fire, appearing and resting on each disciple? Do you imagine a big screen scene of drunken chaos in which people are speaking, hearing, and understanding strange new languages?

Don't we all wish for such an experience of God? Don't we all want something tangible, a sign, a sound, a vision, that reveals God's presence, that guides us in our life, that reassures us? If that doesn't come in the way we expect or think it should then we resort to making bricks and building our own cities with a tower that will reach to God. We work to make a name for ourselves. We try to experience God on our terms. We build walls and towers and try to raise ourselves up to God, imploring Him to work within the limits of our understanding. But that's not how God works. The unfinished Tower of Babel and a scattered and confused people remind us of that.

God doesn't work or act within boundaries we nominate.

Instead, God lives, works, and acts within us.

The miracle of Pentecost is not in the upper room where the disciples gathered. It's not in a sound like the rush of violent wind blowing through the house. It's not in the divided tongues as of fire, and it's not in the strange new languages.

The miracle of Pentecost is the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh; on you and me, on those we know as well as strangers, on those we love as well as enemies, on those who are like us as well as those who are different, and on animals too [cf. Psalm 36:6c]. All flesh.

The outpouring of God's Spirit, God's own life and breath, was prophesied by the prophet, Joel [2:28]. Later, John the Baptist would remind us that while he baptised with water we would be baptised with the Holy Spirit [Mark 1:8]. Finally, Jesus himself reassures us that we will be clothed with power from on high, that the Spirit of truth will abide with us and in us as a Comforter, an Encourager, an Advocate who will teach us and remind us of all Jesus' words [Luke 24:49; John 14:16,17,26; 15:26; 16:13].



The Spirit of God is not a thing or an event. It is the abiding and transforming presence of God's life with us and in us. Wherever life is being created, renewed, put back together, inspired, the Spirit is present. In a sense, it's helpful to think of the Spirit more as a verb than a noun:

In the beginning the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and "spirited" man into a living being by breathing into man's nostrils [Genesis 2:7].

In the valley of dry bones Ezekiel watched as the breath of God from the four winds "spirited" new life into old, dry, brittle bones [Ezekiel 37:1-10].

God "spirited" the virgin Mary so that the child to be born would be holy and called the Son of God [Luke 1:35].

Jesus was "spirited" through the wilderness and anointed to bring good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour [Luke 4:1,14,18,19].

Today we are "spirited" by the wind, the breath, the life of God. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost doesn't mean the Spirit was previously absent. He's been there from the very beginning [Genesis 1:1,2]. With Pentecost He is now present in a different way. He is no longer limited to particular circumstances, events, or persons.

I want you to listen very carefully to this next paragraph. The Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh making us members of the Body of Christ. That means we participate in Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus says, "But take courage; I have conquered the world!" [John 16:33]. And as we heard from Paul, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a

spirit of adoption, . . . we are children of God . . . and joint heirs with Christ” [Romans 8:15-17]. Satan has no dominion over us. We are saved. We are free.

We are free from making bricks. We no longer need to build ourselves a city because we are now the city where God dwells. We no longer need to build a stairway to heaven because Christ is the stairway that bridges heaven and earth. We no longer need to make a name for ourselves because we are now called Children of God. That, is the miracle of Pentecost - God living, breathing, acting, and working with and in us.

That means that Pentecost happens in what we often dismiss as the ordinary everyday circumstances of our lives. But there’s nothing ordinary about life. Our “pentecosted” lives look like forgiveness and reconciliation; courage in the midst of a confusing and fearful life; hope in spite of what feels like unending sorrow and loss; joy and gratitude for everyone and everything you see; and silence which is filled with God’s presence.

I should record the conversations I have with many of you blessed saints. I am constantly thrilled by stories of inspiration, dreams, visions of hope and new possibilities; stories about God’s deeds of power; deeds such as mercy and forgiveness, love, compassion, justice, beauty, generosity, courage, hope, and healing. In every one of those moments we are being “spirited.”

This “spiriting” is what sustains and renews our lives and our world. God breathes out and we breathe in. We breathe out and God breathes in. Back and forth it flows. God and humanity sharing the divine breath of life. Take a deep breath, it is Pentecost. Let it all out, it is Pentecost. Now do it again. You’ve been pentecosted! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will continue to Pentecost and protect you, in Christ Jesus. Amen.