

PENTECOST SUNDAY-May 28, 2023

A bit about the day of Pentecost... Pentecost was a centuries old tradition stretching back to harvest festivals. people brought the first fruits of the harvest, dedicating them to God and praying for an abundant harvest to follow. Today, some might say this was the people's way of saying "And God's just getting started". Pentecost was called the Festival of Weeks, a time when people celebrated receiving the Torah, God's instruction both in written form and in the oral tradition and living interpretations of each generation. Imagine if the scene in Jerusalem is another one of those times when "God's just getting started".

John 20:19-23

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Acts 2:4-6

4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

What if we're talking about something more than a neat trick? The whooshing chaos drew the crowds; hearing in their own language bewildered them. These people knew that if you want to get along in the empire that just conquered you, you better get with the program and learn their language. The Spirit of empires is often about control. Often, the spirit of the powers that be marginalizes people—so imagine people from everywhere hearing God's love proclaimed in their OWN language.

Our friend Doris, bless her memory, was carted off to boarding school—residential school we call it here— when she was five or six—. She and her classmates were routinely beaten for speaking Lakota, the language of her people. What might it have been like for Doris to hear God's Spirit of love declared to her in Lakota?

The Spirit of God, speaking in everybody's language embraces and includes. Here's God doing what God always does; just in a novel way, that day in Jerusalem.

The Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus radically include.

Thanks to Rev. Dr. Jeremy Williams from Southern Methodist University in Texas for the way he unpacks the reading from Acts today. In his commentary appearing on the Working Preacher website, He helps us notice who and what's named and who and what isn't named...

-Joel writes that God's spirit would be poured upon all flesh .

Daughters, young people, elderly, slaves even all receiving God's outpouring of Spirit! As Dr. Williams points out, "It is worth noting that those who are named as receiving the pouring out of the Spirit are relatively powerless without the Spirit."

Now for the scandalous bit....Dr. Williams tells us who's NOT named: , the wealthy, the patriarchs, the able bodied, and the enslavers. He hastens to add: "This is not to suggest that they are not included, but perhaps by tending to those who are chronically ignored and overlooked, the prophet highlights that those who think they are safe because of their wealth, gender, ability, or domination of others are the very ones who need new tongues to call on the name of God and be saved." (Rev Dr. Jeremy Williams, Brite School of Theology SMU, Dallas TX-commentary from Working Preacher).

We all need saving! A seminary mate of mine writes powerfully in book and blog and she often comes back to the theme of God short circuiting oppression in a way that brings saving, healing and restoring for everybody. Recently the Rev. Dr. Anna Madsen visited the city where she studied for her doctorate—Regensburg Germany.

In the city there is art work depicting a truly evil spirit that we call holocaust. The images haunt her and inspire her to reflect on the many Spirits in our world...

A scene recounts Jewish people being paraded through the public square, made to carry signs condemning them for being who they are. People watched from behind heavy curtains as their fellow townspeople were prodded onto trains bound for the death camps.

Such spirits torment us even now. Let Anna's words preach to us today: "Given that, and given the stakes, we dare not, on this Pentecost Sunday, miss that in addition to these kinds of spirits, the Holy Spirit has announced Her presence.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.

She is here, She is active, She is encouraging, and She is upending everything.

For those who care and have the courage to notice, Acts 2 is being re-en-Acted in real time.

And while the Holy Spirit is many things, being patient at apathy, tolerant of hate, or down with Christians who miss the radical nature of the living God who is here not just to proclaim peace but to enact justice...these are not Her strong suits.

See, injustices, hate, malice, and evil are being paraded right in front of us as blatantly as the Jews of Regensburg were paraded in front of those lingering on the sidelines.

The spirit of the day is not holy.

Mob spirits have been let loose.

Fortunately for us, the Holy Spirit has as well.

All seek to stir you and sweep you into the streets to do their bidding.

Come Holy Spirit.

Move ours.” (From her Blog OMG)