

This morning, I want to explore three new insights, well newish insights, that emerge from my reading of the lection:

- 1) The Spirit's intentional use of diverse languages is an indictment upon empire.
- 2) The Spirit has always been here, and it's always gonna be here.
- 3) The events of Pentecost signal the dogged determination of the disciples to follow the example(s) of Jesus.

***The Spirit's intentional use of diverse languages is an indictment upon empire.***

Don't fool yourselves. I know we like to believe that Jesus and his friends spoke Aramaic. Maybe they were even fluent. But they lived in a Roman-controlled area around the Mediterranean Sea that standardized the Koine Greek language. They knew and spoke some form of the people's Greek. They just did. Their very survival would have depended on it.

The Spirit did not call upon the apostles to be efficient in proclaiming its presence in Jerusalem. The Spirit called upon them to be inclusive. The languages of empires, be they Greek, Latin, Persian, or English have the purpose of streamlining communications. But they also assimilate and strip subdued peoples of their varied gifts, strengths, and identities. And a common language allows the powerful to maintain, assert, and strengthen their power over the marginalized.

The Spirit chooses to be received in the most profound and personal of ways – it is spoken about and understood in varying tongues and dialects in order that created beings might experience its presence as the very beings God created them to be.

God's inbreaking realm will not be dependent on the subversive tools of the false empires that seek to claim it. God's world transcends Caesar's tongue, now, and always.

***The Spirit has always been here, and it's always gonna be here.***

To be sure, the Spirit is most pronounced and most public in today's text. But the Spirit didn't just suddenly arrive on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit manifested itself in God's creative breath at the beginning of time; the Spirit was manifested in the ways it inspired characters like Moses, Ezekiel, and Hannah, in the form of Lady Wisdom at the city gate, and in Luke's gospel alone through the empowering of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, John, and Jesus just to name a few.

Often times, we get so Jesus-centric in our expression of faith, that we forget God was present before his earthly presence. It's not that Jesus ushered God into the world; it's that Jesus illumined for us, revealed for us, what was always there and always will be. The same is true of the Spirit. Pentecost doesn't mark its beginning. Pentecost, for us, is a tangible moment, where we understand that the Spirit which filled, empowered, and reverberated through our ancestors is also fully capable of doing the same for whole communities. It's not just that Jesus was filled with God's spirit, it's that each and every one of us, individually and collectively, can be too, are invited to be as well.

***The events of Pentecost signal the dogged determination of the disciples to follow in the example of Jesus.***

It's pretty simple really. Jesus followed John into those baptismal waters, and the Spirit fell fresh upon him, and in the Spirit's presence, Jesus was empowered to become the One God called him to be. And I don't have to tell you that Jesus chose not to employ the Empire's personnel manual. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to discover, love, celebrate and encourage the humanity, the God-centeredness, the compelling uniqueness and beauty of all he encountered. Jesus traded the top-down proclamations of this world's kingdoms for the bottom-up, transformative and collaborative dialogue of God's kingdom. Pentecost becomes the historical marker of when the life of Jesus is modeled to scale.

The Acts of the Apostles are the fruit of Jesus' earthly ministry. The apostles, which include the disciples, and later folks like Steven, and Philip, and Paul, and Barnabas, and Lydia, and Priscilla and Aquila, and so many more to follow, are filled with the Holy Spirit, sometimes in exciting ways, sometimes in ordinary ways, and set about to see the God-centeredness in others. It's worth noting that their interactions, relationship-making, and community-building extend to every nation and tongue beyond Jerusalem. The Jesus movement becomes the diaspora it was intended to be. Just as in the beginning of our faith tradition, mamas and daddies told their little ones the stories in order that they might first know them, then live them, then share them, then teach them, in order that the process might continue to the next generation. So too, the apostles are now living the very stories they learned in the presence of Jesus.

So there you go, three things about this Pentecost text:

- 1) Diverse language is an indictment of empire.
- 2) The Spirit has always been here.

3) The Apostles have fulfilled what Jesus invited them to do.

These three insights generate three questions for us this morning.

***First, what tools of empire are we employing that prevent the authentic movement of the Spirit in this place?*** Can we imagine winds that blow and fires that flame beyond our existing structures? Must everyone speak our exact theological language – the new ones we’ve created or inherited, or perhaps the ones we insist on being discarded? Can the Spirit thrive beyond our traditions, and programmatic rituals, and sacred scheduled calendar appointments? We are competent, perhaps even highly-skilled at learning to be creative within the confounds of our predictable structures. But are we willing to create new structures, new ways of being, new ways imagining ministry that can speak those languages and dialects that transcend our own familiar tongues?

***Second, if the Spirit is indeed among us, and I certainly faith that it is, what things are we willing to do to grasp its presence?*** In other words, are we willing to be swept up in its newness, in its discomfort and disorientation, in its provocations, in its insistence on carrying us toward the things and people and places that upset the status quo? Are we bidding God’s kin-dom be now?

***Finally, are we ready to be part of the story?*** We spend the whole of Luke’s gospel chastising the disciples, with the advantage of hindsight, for their unwillingness or their inability to recognize God’s presence in their midst. But on Pentecost, they respond, and admirably I might add, to our knit-picking of their humanity. They choose to be part of the story. Jesus is no longer something to behold; Jesus is something to become.

When I read today's text, and I consider the questions it provokes, I believe we have to be the kind of community that never stops challenging itself to help make the Spirit more accessible, more visible, more present for others. And I believe we have to be the kind of community that's willing to receive and share God's Spirit, not as the people Caesar bids us to be, but as the people God created us to be. And I think, at some point, we have to insert ourselves into the story.

Friends, the flames are burning, and the winds are blowing. May our hearts be set on fire, and may our faces feel the cool winds of the Spirit in order that we might tell the old, old story in new, new ways. Our ways, the ways God created us to learn, and to live, and to ultimately be the story.

May it be so, and may it be soon!

Amen.