

Scripture Readings and Sermon

June 5, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Acts 2:1-21

The word "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word "pentekostes" which means fifty. Pentecost is the Jewish celebration mentioned in Leviticus 23:16, "You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the LORD". Called *Shavu'ot* ("Weeks") in Hebrew, the festival is one of three pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem. The festival is also called "Day of Firstfruits" (Numbers 28:26) and "Feast of the Harvest" (Exodus 23:16) since the first fruits (winter wheat) is offered to God to bless the summer wheat harvest. A connection has been made between the disciples ("students") receiving the Holy Spirit and becoming the first apostles ("sent ones") with the "first fruits" of Jesus' ministry. It is during this same time of year that some scholars believe that Moses came down the mountain with the Torah (Law) based on Exodus 19:1. Symbolically, just as Moses ascended the mountain and came down with the law so to did Jesus ascend and the Spirit came down. This law, however, was not written on stone but on the heart. The importance of this festival as a pilgrimage also gives a back drop to the various languages and dialects described in Acts 2:9-11. Just as human arrogance caused people to be divided at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:7-9), so now humility and faith in Jesus brings humanity together in Christ.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

What gifts has God given you?

Are the gifts of the Spirit only those listed in the Bible?

What is the purpose of the gifts?

What other 'gifts' might be needed to achieve the same purpose today?

Could using social media or computers be a way to "speak in other languages"?

Could understanding the phrases a group of people you work with use be a gift?

Commentary on John 14:8-17, 25-27

The Gospel of John has been building to this point. In Chapter 3, Jesus states clearly that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The will of God, the Father, is love revealed in Jesus. Jesus is not just a person but is the incarnation of God on earth. Since the will of God can not be divided, knowing Jesus is knowing God and knowing God is knowing the Father. If you have seen Jesus then you have seen the Father. Because the unity of the will was never diminished, the works of Jesus were the works of the Father. Since the will of God is love, than the Father loves the world, Jesus loves the disciples, and the Spirit instills that love in the believer. Jesus is in turn known to the world because of the love of His disciples. While we can not properly love as we ought, the Father will send His love as the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit. It is through this Spirit, that the love of God in Jesus will become manifest in the lives of the believers. The love of the Father is in the Son. The love of the Son is in the Spirit. The love of the Spirit is in the believer. This love, however, is not one way but flows back and forth as a living presence. Jesus therefore says, "because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." If Jesus is the Truth than the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth which lives in the believer. If Jesus is the only mediator and advocate than the Spirit is the Advocate which intercedes on behalf of the believer. Jesus' response to Philip shifts the Father's house from a heavenly spiritual location to the hearts of the disciples who obey the new commandment. The Advocate will dwell in the house and will bring the Peace of God which drives out all fear. Two interesting things to note. First is that the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate only in this Chapter in John and no where else in the Scriptures. Second thing to note is that,

while the term Father is used in Mark: 4 times, Luke: 15 times, and in Mathew: 43 times, the term Father occurs 108 times in John and 21 times in Chapter 14 alone.

John 14:26 But the Advocate, 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.

Have you ever had an “Ah Ha!” moment?

Did you credit the Holy Spirit or your own wisdom or 'dumb' luck?

Did you ever avoid something because it 'felt' wrong or do something because it 'felt' right?

When has the Holy Spirit guided you in the past?

When have you been aware of that guidance?

What guidance is the Spirit giving you now?

Commentary on Romans 8:14-17

For Paul, the flesh does not represent the created nature which God declared good but rather the self centered survival instincts that seek immediate gratification of the individual over the longer term needs of the community. Paul uses the term flesh to refer to all actions which distort the original goodness. The Spirit reveals a better way to act based not on self gratification but on sacrificial love. Like a parent leading a child, the Spirit reveals the destructive nature of our habits and leads us into positive habits and relationships. The term Abba which means "Daddy" is an intimate reference by a child towards their father and is rarely used in religious Jewish writings because of presumption of familiarity. For Paul, however, this familiarity is possible because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which changes our relationship to God from legal covenant to a familial relationship with God as Father. With God as Father, then all of creation is the Father's house. Just as our sinful focus on self gratification distorts our relationship with God and one another, it also distorts our relationship with creation. All of creation suffers and "groans" in pain awaiting the salvation of humanity and the restoration of compassion for both humanity and creation. This suffering began to be relieved when the "first fruits of the Spirit" was given at Pentecost. This gift not only brought understanding but with understanding brought hope through faith in the promises of God revealed in Christ. As children of God through the Spirit, all of creation is being restored to its original goodness.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!"

What does it mean to be part of a family?

Have you ever experienced a 'healthy' family – yours or someone else's?

How do these families handle conflict and differences?

Is it possible to love one another and still be completely different?

If we can do it in our families, then why do we find it so hard as a member of God's family?

What if all believers treated each other as family and not based on race, gender, or culture?

Reflection on Acts 2:1-21, John 14:8-17, 25-27, Romans 8:14-17

Sermon “One In the Spirit”

President John F. Kennedy ended his address to the Canadian Parliament in 1961 with the words “What unites us is far greater than what divides us.” While JFK was speaking about history, economics, and geography, as Christians we know this is fact because what unites us is God in the Holy Spirit. At the center, our faith is not based on a set of laws or even a covenant but upon the very presence of God given at Pentecost. Those whom Jesus redeemed have been bound together through the Holy Spirit as one family.

On this Pentecost when the Jewish people celebrate the giving of the Law, we celebrate the gift of God's Spirit who empowers us to fulfill the Law. Just as thousands were killed when the Law

exposed their sin with the Golden Calf, so the Spirit saved thousands through the gift of grace made possible by faith in Christ. And just as people were scattered across the world and confused with various languages at the Tower of Babel, so to were people gathered from various parts of the world when the Spirit overcame differences in language. Those aspects of the world that try to divide us are no match for the power of God's love and grace in the Holy Spirit which strives to unite us.

Just as Jesus is one with the Father through the Holy Spirit, we too become one with Christ through the Holy Spirit. The breath and spirit of God which brought order to the chaos of creation and brought life to our lifeless forms binds all of those who have faith in Jesus. We are not just bound to God through a legal covenant but we have become bound through family ties. This is what Paul means in Romans when he says that through the Holy Spirit we become children of God. Human barriers of race and language, customs and prejudices, fall away like straw before the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is the will of God manifested in our lives through Jesus Christ, we begin to be aware of the movement of God in all of creation. Things that once seemed disconnected and random suddenly become a brilliant tapestry of God's design. Like Peter, we begin to understand God's work of love and grace. We begin to perceive more of what unites us as God's children than what divides us as nations and races. We begin to discern God's will in our lives and in the life of our community and we feel convicted to follow the Father's will. The words of Jesus become alive in our lives and the Holy Spirit takes us to place we never dreamed possible. What unites us is far greater than what divides us. Let us join with the apostles who waited for that day of Pentecost and say "Come, Holy Spirit".