

Sermon for May 27 – PENTECOST and Memorial Day

Genesis 11: 1-9

Acts 2: 1-21

John 14: 8-17 (25-27)

The story of Christianity is the story of restoration: the restoration of humanity to full relationship with God, because of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It is a story of healing. It is a story of reconciliation: of our reconciliation with God, and also in part our reconciliation with one another. Humanity was separated from God when Adam and Eve chose to do what they wanted to do when they wanted to do it, without talking to God. That willfulness, that laziness, that unwillingness to put things on the table, lead directly to our separation from God. Today's reading from Genesis lays out for us how we became separated from one another. Up until this time humanity was still fairly united. They remembered that they were all descended from Noah and his wife. They had one language and the same words. They were neighbors. And then, again in willfulness, they acted – this time by attempting to rise up to heaven TO MAKE A NAME FOR THEMSELVES. They were not working to the glory of God; they were working to the glory of themselves. And God responded, by reminding them who is God, and who isn't. Their unity with one another was shattered; instead of being family, kin, neighbors, they were indeed scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth, with not even a common language to help them remember that we are all created to be neighbors for one another.

Pentecost began the healing of that breach between humans, even as Jesus' death and resurrection healed the breach between humanity and God. When the Holy Spirit poured out upon those gathered together in the upper room, the first healing happened: they were able to literally understand one another again. Out of that understanding grew their desire and ability to testify to the fact that Jesus is Lord. And out of that understanding grew their desire to serve one another.

It is out of that desire to serve one another that many of us volunteer. Volunteering is important; it is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit puts on flesh – our flesh – in the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. Most of you here have volunteered in this, or in other churches, for almost your entire lives. Some also volunteer in the wider community: in the schools, in hospitals, in community service organizations. Today we have two past presidents from the Whitehouse Rescue Squad, Bob Paulson and Larry Lelah, to remind us of how, at Pentecost, with the giving of the Spirit, we can reach out to the neighbors we have here in our community, by serving in the rescue squad or in the volunteer fire department, among other things. We can do this as part of our Christian witness, as part of our way of being used by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Christ in the world. Bob Paulson.

Genesis 11: 1-9

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.

Acts 2: 1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

Peter Addresses the Crowd

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

“In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

John 14: 8-17 (25-27)

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

25-27

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 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. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.