

Acts 2, Pentecost 10 Minute teaching

I. Advanced Organizer.

- A. Whether you are aware or not, today is actually a special day in the Jesus Centered tradition; **a day some call “the birthday of the church”**. What is this day and why do some traditions call it the church’s birthday?
- B. The name of this day, as Brent mentioned earlier, is “**Pentecost**”, the day our tradition honors what Christians say happened roughly fifty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

II. The Story

- A. Now the story appears in our Bible in what you might call the sequel to the gospel of Luke, another book written by Luke as the **Acts of the Apostles, or commonly known just as “Acts”**.
- B. The way Luke tells the story, after Jesus died and rose from the dead he made a number of appearances to people in this strange resurrected form, and then after 40 days, he went away. He “ascended to heaven” as they say, but he told his followers, what Luke says was about 120 people, to stay in Jerusalem, and be on the lookout for something powerful that was yet to happen and would be core to the next chapter of the story Jesus been a part of.
- C. And then Luke describes what soon happened like this in Acts, Chapter 2:
When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.

7 Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? 9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” 12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy...

1. Peter goes on to describe to the people how what they were witnessing was connected to the vision that prophets from their Jewish tradition had long held about an era that was to come, and how Jesus of Nazareth was a core part of that vision being realized. And upon hearing this, and being struck by the spiritual power that was being released, the story says thousands of people gathered that day became Jesus followers and joined the new spiritual community now being formed.

III. Unpacking the Story

- A. So what's happening here? Well, an important bit of background to this story to understand is that this strange event didn't happen on just any day. It happened during a festival that Luke calls "Pentecost", a word in Greek that's connected to 50, because it took place roughly 50 days after the Passover. **Another name for this Jewish festival, which is still honored by Jewish people today is "Shavuot"**. It's a Harvest festival that in this period, brought people together from all around the known world.
- B. In this midst of this festival in which thousands are descending on the capitol of Jerusalem, is this group of about 100 of Jesus' closest followers who have been hanging there together since the last big religious festival: Passover. They have clung to each other through the midst of a traumatic season, just like many of us have one over the last fifteen months, but now on this day, something new is happening among them.
- C. There's a lot that's weird and strange about what happens when the Spirit appears in the story, but what I find most fascinating is the **arrival of the gift of languages**, the "gift of tongues". Why languages? What did it mean? It wasn't simply about communication. The people gathered from all around the known world didn't need the Spirit to come for them to understand each other. The people in that day already shared a common language of Greek - so they could speak to one another that way. This gift had to be about something more.
- D. When the Spirit of God came that day and caused people to praise God in languages that they had never learned, it spoke something deep to those who heard those words. By translating praise of the Divine to all of these native languages, **the Spirit of God was breaking cultural barriers**. The Spirit of God was affirming very diverse groups of people. The Divine was speaking to folks not just with words that their heads could understand, but words that would ring in their hearts. These languages being expressed were the languages these visitors first spoke as tiny children. They were the languages of their dreams. And to hear God's praises sung not in Hebrew, not in Aramaic, not even in Greek, but in their native languages would have been a profound experience.
 1. Thank about it: these folks hearing their native languages - **these are the folks on the margins in the Jewish faith**. They are not the majority culture. The burden of the cross cultural work for inclusion in the spiritual community has always been on them. And in one fell swoop as the Spirit of God comes and brings worship in every cultural expression, a new era is born.
 2. As this happens, it's like **God is saying to each person gathered, "This move of God, this expansion of the Divine family, this new day that's dawning, this thing God is building, this includes you"**. You are my people, Parthians. You are my people, Medes,

and so on and so on and so on.” I think the reason Luke gives us such an extended detailed list of people gathered is because he gets how revolutionary this is. The family of God is no longer just about those in Jerusalem, or Judea. This is a whole new day. Because God takes the initiative to speak the language of all of our hearts; the language of our dreams; and to empower our human family to do the same.

3. **I believe the same Spirit that empowered that gift of languages is at work in us today when we center and value the gifts and cultural expressions of the marginalized in our time**, naming with clarity, “Black Lives Matter”, “Trans Lives Matter”, “AAPI Lives Matter”, “Queer Lives Matter”, “Children’s Lives Matter” “Palestinian Lives Matter”, “Disabled Lives Matter”, “Elders Lives Matter” “Jewish Lives Matter” and so on and so on.
 4. At Haven, our vision is to build safe, diverse Jesus-centered community. But **that vision is not original to us**. The Pentecost story reminds us that the Divine who has made all people in their image has been doing the work of bringing them together, breaking down walls that divide and creating diverse community from day 1.
- E. So our sacred story tells us that the giving of the Holy Spirit made a way for multicultural community. But there’s another truth this Pentecost story tells that I was to remind us of this morning. The coming of the Spirit also demonstrated that **all people can hear from God**. God is not out there somewhere. God is also in here.
1. Remember the words that Peter quoted when he pointed to the prophet Joel: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”
 2. This is an amazing idea that also rings deeply true. It’s the wisdom that mystics across faith traditions have received: **that the voice of the Sacred speaks to us from within**. We are vessels of the Divine. Each of us can give voice to who God is and what they are doing in the world. Not just the pastor. Not just the priest. Not just the prophet. All of us are invited to hear and share spiritual truth from within ourselves and to speak it in all of our native languages. All of us are invited to hear and honor the divinity that our family members speak - from the eldest and wisest to the youngest among us.
- F. **This is why I think what happened at Pentecost is called the birth of the church** - because it’s the origin story in our tradition for this experience we’re here to embody today - community coming together, drawn by a common spiritual connection, experiencing the Divine in our midst as each of us brings forward the gifts God has given us to bring.
1. So **Happy Birthday, Haven**. We are a part of a bigger story. As we go about the business of living into this next chapter of Haven’s life, may this be an encouragement and invitation to all of us, to allow this same Spirit that came with power at Pentecost and brought new life to the Jesus-centered community there fill us with new life and the capacity to see, hear and experience the Divine together. Amen.