

Pentecost Sunday
May 23, 2021

Pouring out Our Lives for the World
Acts 2:1-21

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S- Scripture: Acts 2:1-21 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 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. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷'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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Today's notes are written by Dr. Jerry Webber, former pastor of Chapelwood's Center for Christian Spirituality and leader in contemplative practice. "The day of Pentecost was a significant marker for the early band of Christians. The account in Acts 2 is extraordinary and over-the-top in many ways . . . an explosion of God's Spirit bursting upon those gathered in Jerusalem for the festival at Pentecost," writes Jerry Webber. **"Historically, Pentecost has been a time of celebration and covenant renewal, a reminder to attend to one's life in God.** In the Christian tradition, we tend to have a very narrow sense of what Pentecost means. While the day is full of meaning for those who are Christ-followers, the Feast of Pentecost had a long history in the cultural and religious life of ancient Israel.

The Feast of Pentecost was one of the major Jewish feasts. It was also known in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks, marking the end of the celebration of the spring harvest. The liturgical celebration began at Passover, and was a time when devout Israelite families praised God for God's grace and bounty, as evidenced by the springtime harvest. It was also the beginning of a period, lasting until the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles) in autumn, in which the firstfruits of the harvest were sacrificed to the Lord.

And further, for more pious Jews of the time, the Feast of Pentecost was a time of covenant renewal, that is, renewing their covenants both to Yahweh and to the community. At Qumran (the community responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls), for example, Pentecost was the day when the community made an annual renewal of the oath they took when they entered the community.

By the second century A.D., Jewish rabbis regarded the Feast of Pentecost as the commemoration of the day the Law was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Thus, it became associated with the Old Covenant God established with the Israelites through Moses. There is some thought that Luke, in Acts 2, intends to portray to his readers that the events of this day of Pentecost is a kind of New Covenant, the establishment of a new way God is empowering, living through, and sending out God's people into the world.

A-Apply

Pentecost signals that some things are ending and that other things are beginning.

Theologian Paul Tillich, in his landmark book *The New Being*, said that he would summarize the Christian message for contemporary times in two words: New Creation. Tillich, using Galatians 6:15 ("*For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*"), explains it this way:

We all live in the old state of things, and the question asked of us is whether we *also* participate in the new state of things. We belong to the Old Creation, and the demand made upon us by Christianity is that we *also* participate in the New Creation. [Paul Tillich, *The New Being*, p. 15.]

Pentecost, quintessentially, is about this transition from the old state of things to the new state of things . . . leaving behind that which is ending (reliance upon the Law and the emphasis on a rules-based religion) . . . and entering, with the empowering, energizing Spirit of God, the days yet to come when the "*Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh*" (Acts 2:17) . . . entering the days when connection with God would be a matter of the heart, not a matter of outward obedience to a legal code . . . entering the

days when loving the Lord with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength would be demonstrated by loving one's neighbor as one's self.

This is a difficult transition for many, who have grown accustomed to – and actually prefer – the “old creation” with its emphasis on proper behavior, legalistic action, and fundamental religion. We have to be honest at this point:

- Not everyone wants to move out of the old creation and into the new creation.
- Not everyone is ready to transition from the Law of legalism to the Law of Love.
- Not everyone welcomes a shift in their fundamental life's orbit – away from orbiting around group loyalties, political philosophies, and ingrained social structure – toward a more loving, hospitable, and compassionate presence in the world for God.
- What are my responses to the call of the Holy Spirit to move into new ways of being?

The invitation God extends to us at Pentecost is to walk through the threshold from those things that are old and passing away – the old wineskins – and to enter the new thing that God is doing in the world – the new wineskins that are able to hold the new Wine of the Spirit!

P-Pray

Lord, Pentecost reminds us that, like the disciples in the Upper Room on that amazing day, we no longer live in our own power. We do not go out in the world relying on our own natural abilities. We go with the anointing and empowering of God. Like you did for them, You will give us the language necessary to communicate . . . the boldness necessary to speak fearlessly . . . the urgency of persons who have experienced a great transformation within ourselves and feel compelled to share it with others. May it be so, Amen.

*Going Beyond the Sermon is written by Teresa Rossy, Director of Adult Discipleship,
Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.*

Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online, and worship is in person at 9:00 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary of our Greenbay campus. Go to www.chapelwood.org for details.

To get Going Beyond the Sermon in your inbox, e-mail Laura Frost, lfrost@chapelwood.org.

