

All Together

Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23; Psalm 104; 5-27-07

This is a difficult preaching Sunday consisting of a combination of Memorial Day and a major day for the Christian Church—Pentecost. It is vital to remember all those who have died in the service of our country that we may enjoy the freedom built into our system of government. It's important to pray for those who are presently serving our country, 150,000 in Afghanistan and Iraq alone. So, on this weekend make certain you think of and pray for the members of our armed forces both past and present.

This morning, in this little meditation, we are going to focus on Pentecost, more than Memorial Day, and why it matters to us.

Being on one's own when we face the twists and turns and great unknowns of life can be a very scary thing. When things are handled by a group of like-minded, supportive people, problems take on a different light. We gain strength and the assurance that no matter what the present struggles and setbacks may be, we can move forward in faith and hope and know that, eventually, all will be well.

In both of our scripture readings for this morning we find the disciples all together. In one instance they had gathered in fear—they felt abandoned, directionless, and alone. Their leader had been taken away from them, abused and slain. They were fearful that they would be the targets of those who hated and feared the ideals for which their leader stood. Whenever anyone comes along with a fresh, new way of approaching life, he or she is viewed with suspicion. The disciples had been branded as troublemakers by those who feared Jesus. They had been made known by the company they kept.

The appearance of Jesus, as startling as it must have been, helped unscramble their minds and calm their fears a bit. To make sure that they would continue the mission he had started he breathed on them reminding them the Holy Spirit would always be with them. Through this reassurance they received a positive message that things would be better, they would never stand alone, and that there was hope for the future.

Evidently his visit served its purpose, for when we catch up with the disciples in the book of Acts they are still united. They had been praying and Peter had been preaching. They had chosen a new disciple for the inner circle of 12 following the death of Judas.

If you recall, as the Bible tells us, Judas had “purchased a field with the reward of his wickedness and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.” After this event the field was known as the “Field of Blood.”

The disciples cast lots for Judas' replacement. Matthias won out over Barsabbas.

So, they were all gathered together in one place to celebrate the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which is kept in remembrance of the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai, 50 days after the liberation from slavery in Egypt—the time of the Passover. Years later, on this occasion, a mighty wind blew over the gathered disciples and the Jewish feast turned into the Birthday of the Christian Church, fifty days after Easter. The disciples were inspired and driven forward by the flames of the Holy Spirit. They poured out onto the streets eager to share the good news of Christ with all gathered there. They were able to communicate, through the work of the Spirit, in the native languages

of those present. Thus, the movement or mission of Christ took on new energy and direction as well as new followers.

So, we might wonder, how does this old, old story of Pentecost, of the birthday of the church, have any relevance for us? Well, step back and take a good look at yourselves. During the past two weeks something moved this congregation in a wonderful direction. I like to believe it was the Holy Spirit. You were awakened to the special gifts and talents that make you a part of the body of Christ. You understood that we all have our roles in giving the body life and strength and that no one role is more important than another. Do you know what this means to any and every pastor? Bob might say it means I could be out of a job. But do you understand? It is absolutely beautiful to see, especially to this Congregationalist. You have done your work, stopped being fearful and lived the gospel, “the good news.” As a friend of mine might say, “Can it get any better than this?” Having discovered what a blessing you are to one another, do you know what a blessing you may become to the community around us? Once we have love and respect for ourselves, we can turn outward and give it away. And, as we all know, “love isn’t love ‘til you give it away.”

That’s what Pentecost is all about, my dear friends—accepting the indwelling nature of the Spirit of God and then finding ways to share it with others. As always, this is a beginning, a door opening, a breath of fresh air, a step forward, old wounds healed, new fires ignited, new languages learned. It all goes to prove that through many circumstances, “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, And he will make it plain.”

It has been made plain, now we just need to hold and cherish the vision as we move on all together.

Amen