

Pentecost  
Year C

Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:25-36, 37  
Romans 8:14-17  
John 14:8-17, 25-27

In any young community, there is a spirit of fear or apprehension about a future without the founding leader. In United States history, this anxiety was manifested in the desire to make George Washington king. What would happen to the country without this man who guided its efforts through war and the creation of its first government? In the same light, the early followers of Jesus were concerned with what their futures might be without Jesus in their midst.

On many occasions, Jesus had talked about His death. Now, in this evening charged with emotions, Jesus has further explained that His going away would initiate a major change in the lives of the disciples. It is understandable, from a human point of view, that the disciples would be concerned about their futures. What would happen to them if Jesus wasn't around? How could they continue? Jesus tells them He must go away, that they would greatly benefit from His departure. His leaving would open a new door for them as the Father would send a new Advocate to them. Jesus was their first Advocate and now, with His departure, God would send another. We see this promise fulfilled in the reading from Acts.

All communities have a beginning with a strong leader. What comes after that first leader determines the viability of that community to survive. Fortunately, in the case of this gathering of Jesus' followers, what God provided created an exciting new beginning. It was so exciting that all of Jerusalem was impacted by it.

Let's look at the scene - a gathering of some 120 people, men, women, and children, gathered in a room, praying that God would fulfill the promise Jesus had given them. This was not just a one shot gathering - they had been coming together daily for prayer for seven weeks. Now, on one of the most important feast days of their Jewish religion, chaos ensued. Sounds like a tornado, flashes like fire, and people speaking in a multitude of languages - all of the languages of the Mediterranean basin. It is no wonder that the people in the city rushed to see what was happening. This small band of people had been discouraged and hiding in fear; now they were attracting the attention of everyone around. What had happened?

This second chapter of Acts is one of the best known passages of all Scripture. We have heard the story since we were children. Or at least, we have heard some version of the story. What is important to remember is that it was not just a select group - the eleven remaining disciples - who were there. They were not speaking spiritual languages that Paul speaks of in his letters - they were speaking the languages of people who had moved to Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire. Most importantly, they were proclaiming God's message to all who gathered.

One of the alternate readings for today is the story of the Tower of Babel from Genesis. Some have called this action on Pentecost as a reversal of the diffusion of languages at that time. But,

all of the languages were still there. There was not a reversal, but an understanding. God caused everyone to be able to understand the message, each in their own language.

Today, we seem to be speaking different languages in our culture. We see division in politics, in attitudes, in languages, and in culture. What was once heralded as the melting pot has become a tossed salad. Instead of everything blending together, we see chunks of very different ingredients. We don't seem to be able to communicate with our neighbors on any issue. We cannot even agree on what our words mean. Perhaps, we need a new movement of the Spirit, a new outpouring to span the gulf between us.

The United States wondered what would happen without George Washington. The disciples wondered what would happen to them without Jesus. They found out on the glorious day when God send another Advocate. The role of that Advocate was to empower the disciples to go out and spread the Good News. It was to motivate them to fulfill the Great Commission - to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It was to equip them with the tools they needed.

The Holy Spirit was not just for those few people gathered in that room 2000 years ago. It is available to us today, to give us the tools we need to reach out to those God has given us as a mission field. All we need to do is seek God, to ask for that spiritual guidance, and trust that we will receive what we need.