

Year C, The Day of Pentecost
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Acts 2:1-21 and Romans 8:14-17

The Spirit Tells Us We Are All Children of God

The prophet Joel wrote, “In the last days, God said, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” Luke quotes him and implies that with Pentecost we have entered the last days and now God’s Spirit has been poured on us. In Luke’s account, Peter, standing among the other eleven apostles and speaking for all, declares this. It’s an insight Jesus had opened their minds too on his last night before his ascension. At that time Jesus had told them to stay in Jerusalem until they were furnished with heavenly power. Now that heavenly power has arrived and we immediately see its impact on the disciples.

The quote from the prophet Joel is filled with dramatic images that point to a transition from one way of being human to another that is bigger than anything we can imagine. Luke wants us to feel the importance of Pentecost in our bones.

Imagine this: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy.” What do they see that we do not? What do they teach us about the world and how it works that lies beyond our awareness? What do Alex, Austin, Chenequa and all those in the next generation have to teach us? We know there is a yearning for peace among them. The inconsistencies and contradictions wear heavily on their souls.

After the Spirit is poured out “Your young will see visions.” What are these visions? When we talk to them what do they say? Pentecost has opened up possibilities. Our young are seeing that we are all children of God. Even the people they find themselves shooting at in wars they find themselves caught in are children of God. They know that intuitively. The Spirit working in history has revealed this to them.

Seeing this seems to make the world better and worse at the same time. It certainly doesn’t make for calm. For example, in India women are no longer willing to absorb the pain of their culture, a pain they have born for centuries. In the Middle East the young have caught a vision for a better world where they are not trapped in poverty, despair and powerlessness. No one knows how these struggles will end. But we do know “The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes,” imagery of profound change in history that must happen before we learn that all are children of God.

The Spirit that knows all are children of God is a powerful spirit that causes “wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.” It’s the same Spirit that poured out upon those gathered in Jerusalem. They were surprised, amazed and bewildered as they heard the mighty works of God in their own language. Some asked each other, ‘What does this mean? Others jeered at them, saying, ‘They’re full of new wine!’” Were they

afraid something was going out of control?

What happens when God's Spirit is poured into a culture and people start seeing each other through eyes that have been opened? When this happened in Jerusalem Peter spoke up and said "Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! These people aren't drunk, as you suspect; after all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning! Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel."

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people....Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." What is this Spirit that the suffering of Christ and his rising in three days set loose? What happens when even servants, both men and women, no longer are willing to see themselves as second class and begin claiming they too are children of God? Could this have anything to do with what we see happening in the world today? Maybe when Jesus poured himself out for us on the cross, when God poured himself out for Jesus raising him from the dead, when the Spirit poured out upon the world, when the sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house, something of a world changing dimension happened. Pentecost was not a religious event, simply marking the beginning of the church, it was far more.

Witnesses to the event said they saw "what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak." Aren't we learning to speak in a new language? A fire seems to have been lite and it's spreading. All people seem to be impacted by it, both those upon whom it is burning, and those who see it and think it a sign of drunkenness. Could this be the fire of discovering we are all and each children of God? All the old divisions that kept us ordered with some who are in and some who are out, some being up and some being down is being challenged. How do we live in a world where all are children of God? We must find a new way. This is the challenge before us and it is earth-shaking.

The Apostle Paul was among the first to catch the full import of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. In Romans he wrote, "All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children." Those upon whom the Spirit has descended know themselves to be the sons and daughters of God. They have a Spirit-engendered new knowledge about themselves. They refuse to think of themselves as any less than God's children. They have been adopted and this has changed how they see everything. Now they know there is no accusing finger saying you are less than others because you are black, or brown, or white or gay or not gay, male or female, servant or slave. You are no longer slaves to these definitions. You have been set free because now you understand all of that is human-made. Jesus showed us this in his suffering and God showed us this in his raising Jesus up on the third day. Pentecost brought an awareness of our true station through the Spirit that has been spreading in history since that day. These are the last days of the old regime because the new has come. What is the new? It is the earth shaking knowledge that we are all children of God.

“You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children.” What is the Spirit really? It’s a feeling of being loved rather than accused. But it’s more than that. It’s a person that God sent among us to tell us who we are and who we can look to. This person tells us that we are children of God. This God-person within speaks with the same words Jesus spoke before his Ascension. The Spirit tells us no pointing finger exists to accuse us. The accusing finger has been exposed and shown to be false. It’s the finger of accusation and fear that has kept us in bondage all our lives but has now been revealed as a lie. We have awakened from that nightmare and the awakening happened at Pentecost, or at least that’s where it began. Now we know “We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.”

Being fellow heirs with Christ does involve suffering. Like Jesus we see the world and it’s suffering for what it is and know there is another way. With Jesus we suffer because the world won’t see it and we wish it would. Our suffering is a mark of our identity. It shows that someday we will be glorified with him when he is glorified. Ah, the day he is glorified, that great and spectacular day of the Lord when we will all know we are children of God. May it come soon!