

Year A, The Day of Pentecost

June 4th, 2017

The Last and Most Important Day of the Festival

When the lectionary writers chose a gospel for the Day of Pentecost in Year A, they selected a passage from the Gospel of John. In the Common English Bible this passage reads “On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted...”

Maybe The Day of Pentecost can be thought of as the last and most important Day of the Festival because from now on we will live out what all the days before reveal to us. To review, we have traversed Lent, Passion Week, Easter, and post-Easter where the post-dead Jesus, the risen victim of our violence, hangs around with us until the Day of Ascension when he returns to the place from which he came. If we have allowed ourselves to enter into the meaning of these significant days, the cumulative effect is mind-boggling. Human anthropology, where we are the center, has been dethroned and human theology turned upside-down. On this day, The Day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are now equipped to live in a new way.

What have we learned so far? What will the Holy Spirit teach us from now on? I want to suggest that Jesus’ shouting above the din of the crowd provides a guide to answering these questions.

“All who thirst should come to me!” he shouted. We are learning that the Holy Spirit always points to Jesus as the solution to our problem with thirst. But this pointing is not religious as in Christianity verses another religion or non-religion. In fact, the Spirit knows Jesus has little to do with religion. Religion has always been a management system for human violence with the various religions in rivalry over who provided the best solution. The Holy Spirit is not interested in religion and looks beyond it to quench the thirst for love, for meaning and for belonging that is deeper than all religions.

In the text from John, Jesus did not shout “All who are thirsty should come to Christianity (or Judaism—Jesus, after all, was a Jew). No, he said all who are thirsty should come to me. Jesus is the embodiment of a new understanding of God; an understanding meant for all humans that opens us up to being able to love God without fear.

Luke, writer of Acts, quotes from the prophet Joel who says “I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” This is not a new religion; it’s a new revelation that goes deeper than all religion. The shout that Jesus put before his audience echoes in our 21st Century ears and rings a note of authenticity. It’s an anthropological and theological articulation that by-passes religion but goes to the core of reality.

What is this thirst that all humans must quench? I think the thirst is our need to find meaning to our life, to discover something to live for, and this must come from beyond our selves. We are imitative and don't know what to desire until we see what we think our neighbor has and then we want that too. That's how we attempt to quench our thirst. And so in our thirst we drink in the meaning we think the other has found but we haven't. When we receive our desire from another human, conflict often develops. But if the one who quenches our thirst is for us and not in rivalry with us we find peace. When we ask God's Son who is in complete accord with his Father to quench our thirst our whole constellation of relationship transforms. This is why Jesus shouted "All who are thirsty should come to me." Our thirst for something that animates, makes us want to get up in the morning, can only be fully and permanently quenched when the water we drink comes from a place beyond all peers and human relationships.

Do you see what I am saying? To be human is to thirst, but it's not for literal water, it's for vitality, aliveness, things we want to do and relationships we want to explore. The one relationship that never leaves us thirsty is Jesus, the Christ. If this is missing we can fall into depression. When we choose a peer, a fellow human to quench our thirst, eventually disappointment enters the picture making us thirstier than before. "All who are thirsty should come to me!" Jesus shouted.

Jesus next shouted "All who believe in me should drink!" Do you believe Jesus is God's Son revealing God's character; that God sent him as a messenger to us so we could find out what God is like? If you believe this, drink it in, imbibe it to your core, allow it to permeate every cell of your body, let its calming spirit inhabit you and gentle you from within.

Do you have difficulty with basic trust? Drink in the truth of Jesus as a revealer of God's faithfulness. Jesus is not in rivalry with us. He is for us, for our well-being, our happiness, and our having a good life. Others may have betrayed us but he won't. He is different from all others. Don't just believe in him; receive him like the bread and wine of communion. Risk again, risk trusting him. This is the Day of Pentecost; the Spirit has entered the world. We have a new resource, a new ally, a new hope, a new confidant, who is fully for us.

The Holy Spirit speaks the words of Jesus to the most timid, fearful and hidden corners of our souls. "All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink!"

Again, this is a word deeper than religion and addresses each of our hearts. It invites us to enter into a relationship with our benevolent, non-violent God who loves us all. It does not invite us to a denomination or a religion exclusive of some; it invites us into a relationship of trust with our Creator.

People around the world are discovering this relationship that softly speaks to the heart. It doesn't often make the headlines but it's happening. Since The Day of Pentecost the story of

Babel is being reversed. Now everyone is hearing the mighty works of God in their own language. Everyone is surprised and bewildered and asks what it means.

The prophet Joel saw it coming. He notices the Spirit cuts across generational boundaries. Sons and daughters tell their parents they intuit a love deeper than religion. The young catch glimpses of it and express it in the sun shining in the upper corner of their works of art. The elderly dream about it and it calms them as they near the end of their lives.

This awareness doesn't respect class or gender. Servants feel it; both men and woman, and they become prophets of love and forgiveness. This awareness is spreading through the world. Where it spreads it disrupts the old order causing wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs in the earth below. People find themselves no longer willing to live as they have and this has led to "blood, and fire and a cloud of smoke."

Joel says "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." Things get worse before they get better but "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Jesus, for a third time, shouted "As the scriptures said concerning me, *Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.*" The narrator adds, "Jesus said this concerning the Spirit." The Day of Pentecost has arrived. The Spirit, the third member to the Trinity, is here. Rivers of living water are flowing out from within him. Thanks be to God!