

Year-C-Pentecost-2019-That Great and Glorious Day

June 9th, 2019

Thomas L. Truby

Acts 2:1-12 and John 14:8-17

That Great and Glorious Day

We were eating in a restaurant in Jerusalem when an extremely loud noise that rattled the windows startled us all. Had a bomb gone off? Was it a plane overhead? The more experienced among us spread the word that it was a sonic boom caused by an Israeli military jet breaking the sound barrier. We settled back down to our meal.

The Acts account begins with, “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” What was it? Where did it come from? At this sound, crowds gathered and were bewildered that Galileans who had their own dialect were speaking in a language everyone understood though the people spoke many languages. It was like the Story of Babel, where language had been confused, only in reverse. Now language became unscrambled and could be understood by each. “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’”

Some said they were all drunk. It wasn’t the first time humans have misinterpreted phenomena they can’t explain.

Peter says this is the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had said and he quotes the passage.

In the last days, the days we now know to be after the death and resurrection of our Lord, God will pour his Spirit upon **all** flesh. It’s the word “all” that grabs my attention. Did he really mean everyone—every tribe, nation, ethnic group, language, religion and sexual orientation? Maybe this is just poetic license that makes it sound grand.

The pouring out of the Spirit that always defends the falsely accused counters the universal finger of blame that divides the world into “us” and “them.” It breaks in from above like the rush of a mighty wind. Its’ power rests on each individual no matter their ethnic background. Everyone hears its’ language in their own tongue. Those who saw this were astounded and perplexed. This couldn’t be a Spirit-thing because whatever this is, it is being poured on outsiders and insiders alike. Some concluded they were drunk.

We see the pouring out of God’s Spirit in Jesus—in his life, his death and his resurrection. This moves us to the heart of the Gospel for today. “Phillip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the father, and we will be satisfied.’” The request surprises Jesus who gently responds, “Have I been with

you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?” Jesus’ response is intimate, personal and relational. Using Philip’s name Jesus responds, “Philip do you still not know me?”

Jesus now moves into his gentle and warm teaching mode. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” Jesus’ questions point to the internal contradictions resident in Philip’s confused heart. I wonder if it had ever occurred to Philip that God resided in Jesus and Jesus resided in God.

We go back to the quote from the prophet Joel: “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” To prophesy is to say that if people continue to live in the manner they are now living the inevitable consequences will be dire. Always the hope is that people will see the point and make changes so that the predicted consequences won’t happen.

On Wednesday, The Oregonian led with this headline: “Climate Kids get their Day in Court.” The twenty one Climate Kids were represented by Julia Ann Olson, a lawyer from Eugene. To quote The Oregonian, “Olson’s young clients are asserting a constitutional right to a sustainable climate and want to order the United States to prepare an energy plan that transitions the nation away from fossil fuels.” Their contention has gotten international attention. I know that my granddaughters and their parents are deeply concerned about this. In writing this sermon I remembered that Seth, our son-in-law, asked Laura and me to accompany our granddaughters on a march supporting it in downtown Portland. With regret I confess I forgot his request. We lost an opportunity to teach our granddaughters values deeply important to us and we lost an opportunity to encourage them to take action in the face of their sense of powerlessness. They know they will have to live with and suffer from the consequences of our generation’s failure to meaningfully address this problem. I offer these young people as examples of, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.”

When God’s Spirit, that Spirit that erases false differences and points toward the universality of the human experience, pours out, young men do see visions and old men do have dreams. We picture a world different than the one we live in and these visions and dreams propel us to live differently than many of those around us.

A couple of weeks ago we saw a movie called “The Big Little Farm.” A young couple, living hectic lives in Los Angeles, dreams of escaping urban life by moving to the country where they intend to farm in harmony with nature. The husband is a videographer and the wife a chef. They must have had deep pockets though the movie never mentions this. They buy 220 acres of former farmland an hour north of L.A. I say “former farm land” because the earth is dead, inert, hard and unworkable.

They hire an old hippy-like expert on organically restoring dead soil, bringing the farm back into harmony with all the other creatures who share the land. This is a subject deeply interesting to me and I might have gone into it professionally had my farmer-father and I not had so many conflicts.

Of course, the young urban-born couple begins with an idealistic notion of how easy and quick this transformation is going to be. Since they kept a video record of their whole experience, we see them as they begin. We see their dry dam that once held water for their summer irrigation. We see their nearly-dead fruit trees before they cut them down and started over. We see the muddy water running off their fields on the rare occasions when it did rain.

Each year they face devastating setbacks, are tempted to give up and then recommit to their original, though modified vision. Their guru dies of cancer; snails proliferate in their cover crops and attack their young fruit trees until they discover that ducks love snails and fertilize the fruit trees with them. Coyotes get their chickens and ignore the burgeoning gopher population until they get guard dogs trained to protect chickens.

Seven years later, and after great deal of money spent, I'm sure; the farm is transformed, healthy and beautiful. The earth has been renewed and become fruitful. I offer this as an example of "Even upon my slaves (slaves to L.A.'s subhuman life), both men and women, in those days I will pour my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." The whole movie is a hopeful way of pointing to how we must learn to tend the land sustainably if we are to survive on this planet.

The ancient text Luke uses to clarify the meaning of Pentecost now takes a darker tone. "And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below." Does not being able to see the heavens above due to smoke and seeing the forest consumed by fire constitute a sign? The people of Ashland are worried. Last year the Shakespeare Festival lost two million dollars in smoke-related decline in theater attendance.

"The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day." O.K., so it's getting scary but this difficult time is just before the Lord's great and glorious day. That's where the hope is—it's in his coming, even though it is a mystery as to what form his coming will take. The hope of his coming is the love-foundation that will never give way! Maybe we cause the scorched earth but God brings the great and glorious day beyond it. "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." I find that very hopeful. Thanks be to God. Amen.