

Pentecost Year B 2021

Acts 2:1–21 Psalm 104:24–34, 35b Romans 8:22–27 John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15

Waiting is hard.

As most, if not all of us know, having to wait for something or someone is hard.

Waiting is what the disciples have been doing for some time now.

The events that we re-remembered at Easter happened at Passover, the event called the Ascension was 40 days later and now it is 10 days after that, so 50 days since that traumatic weekend.

We heard in the Gospel reading that Jesus told the disciples to be his witnesses and do his work in the world and promised them that the Advocate would come to empower them. In John's version of events, that was before he was arrested. At that time, they had no idea of what would unfold, no idea of how long they would have to wait for these things to come to pass.

Perhaps they thought it would happen after he was crucified, or sometime in the limbo after that, or on the same afternoon the day of the Ascension, or maybe a week after that. They had to wait another 10 days until the day of Pentecost. Can you imagine how their patience and kindness and compassion were tested during this time of waiting?

Pentecost comes from a Jewish harvest festival called *Shavuot* held 50 days after Passover. The disciples were gathered to celebrate this festival, which marks the conclusion of the grain harvest. The first sheaf reaped from the barley harvest was presented to God at Passover and at Pentecost it is the firstfruits of the wheat harvest that were presented – loaves of bread made from the first wheat of the harvest.

Contemporary Jews also commemorate the gift of the Law, at *Shavuot*. It is not clear whether this was the practice in Luke's day.

Certainly, however, Luke's narrative seems to be the basis for the Christian appropriation and reinterpretation of the festival day.

After spending a long time apprenticed to Jesus, observing and learning from him, Jesus has left the disciples. But, the story of Acts, tells us, they do not scatter and go back to their separate homes. Instead, they continue to meet together, "joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1: 14).

Like us sometimes, perhaps often, they probably are not sure what to do next. So they wait, and wonder and pray. Perhaps also like us, they are probably sure that they will not be up to the challenge of whatever it is that God has planned for them. Whatever it is that Jesus told them to wait for. I wonder what they were waiting for, what they were expecting? What happens is most likely not at all what they expected.

What happens is divine special effects yet again. All being Jews, the disciples very likely knew their Scriptures so they knew what divine creativity and imagination was capable of: Plagues in Egypt, seas parting, manna from heaven, ladders up to heaven, burning bushes and more recently, angels, dreams and guiding stars.

But what happens to them is never recorded in Scripture before or after the event we recall today: A sound like the rush of a violent wind and divided tongues of fire resting on everyone. And then, talking in what was for them, foreign languages. One scholar notes that Galileans were apparently known to be uncultured and poor speakers. "Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial." (Longenecher). So it was all the more reason to be impressed by their sudden eloquence in other languages.

I was struck by what the disciples actually say and by the fact that it is likely that they do not even understand what they are saying in these foreign languages. They do not immediately start witnessing and trying to convert the gathered crowds. No, they speak about "God's deeds of power".

Power to **do** stuff, to witness, to go out and preach, teach, heal the sick, cast out demons, pick up snakes and drink poison and not be harmed etc. (Mark 16: 17), that will come later but what comes now is this: *Praise*. The infilling of the HS in a special way makes them **praise God**.

They have probably been convinced that what will happen is that God will expect them to **do** something difficult, a challenge. Instead, the movement of the HS first off affects their **being**, not their *doing*. The Spirit makes them people of praise, people of gratitude, people of joy. That's a surprise!

So, what to make of this Feast of Pentecost? It comes around every year, although 2020 was strange, we did "Drive-thru' Church" at Pentecost last year.

The event and its immediate result were undoubtedly unexpected for the disciples, perhaps it is for us too.

If you read on in Acts, as a result of Peter's telling the crowd about Jesus of Nazareth, people were baptised and "about 3 000 were added to their number" (Acts 2: 41). Have you ever converted 3 people at once, let alone 3 000? The story of Pentecost is one of those that can be very effective at inducing guilt in us if it is interpreted to be all about **doing**.

This year, I want to suggest that Pentecost comes to remind us that we have not been abandoned. Yes, we do not have Jesus with us anymore, but the Spirit of God is here with us, and its first priority is not our **doing**, but our **being**. I talked two weeks ago about what it means to "be" for God, instead of "do" for God.

Are we as individuals and as a community as people of the HS, are we joyful people of gratitude and praise?

I will end with a prayer by Michael Leunig whom I had the pleasure to hear speak this week:

Dear God,

We pray for another way of being:
another way of knowing.

Across the difficult terrain of our existence
we have attempted to build a highway
and in so doing have lost our footpath.
God lead us to our footpath:
Lead us there where in simplicity
we may move at the speed of natural creatures
and feel the earth's love beneath our feet.
Lead us there where step-by-step we may feel
the movement of creation in our hearts.
And lead us there where side-by-side
we may feel the embrace of the common soul.
Nothing can be loved at speed.

God lead us to the slow path; to the joyous insights
of the pilgrim; another way of knowing: another way of being.

Amen.



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