

DAY OF PENTECOST

Year C

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Acts 2:1-21

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above

and signs on the earth below,

blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Commentary from Molly Cooke

In this description of the day of Pentecost from the book of Acts, we have the momentary undoing of the linguistic differentiation and ensuing confusion and tribalism that occurred at the Tower of Babel all the way back in Genesis 11. Pentecost is also considered the birthday of the Church because the Spirit anoints the apostles for their diverse ministries with the ability to speak the indigenous languages of the people they are called to serve.

Despite occasionally being mistaken for drunkenness (as it was on the day of Pentecost), speaking in tongues is one of several “spiritual gifts” or charisms named throughout the New Testament (predominantly in the Pauline epistles) that help servants of God to overcome the conditions of this world in order to bring us closer to the kingdom of God. Lists of other spiritual gifts can be found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 28-30, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Peter 4:11.

Discussion Questions

What gift(s) has the Spirit given you that empower you for ministry in the Church?

What gift(s) do you recognize in those around you?

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

- ²⁵ O Lord, how manifold are your works! *
in wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
- ²⁶ Yonder is the great and wide sea
with its living things too many to number, *
creatures both small and great.
- ²⁷ There move the ships,
and there is that Leviathan, *
which you have made for the sport of it.
- ²⁸ All of them look to you *
to give them their food in due season.
- ²⁹ You give it to them; they gather it; *
you open your hand, and they are filled with
good things.
- ³⁰ You hide your face, and they are terrified; *
you take away their breath,
and they die and return to their dust.
- ³¹ You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; *
and so you renew the face of the earth.
- ³² May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; *
may the Lord rejoice in all his works.
- ³³ He looks at the earth and it trembles; *
he touches the mountains and they smoke.
- ³⁴ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; *
I will praise my God while I have my being.
- ³⁵ May these words of mine please him; *
I will rejoice in the Lord.
- ³⁷ Bless the Lord, O my soul. *
Hallelujah!

Commentary from Molly Cooke

The lectionary omits a verse of this psalm that doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the theme of praise. Verse 36 implores, "Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and the wicked be no more." It's no wonder we don't read it in church on Pentecost.

But there's no getting around the fact that the psalms are full of violence. They represent the full range of human emotions. In this case, the imagery of sinners being "consumed" is particularly poignant because Psalm 104 also includes one of a handful of references to Leviathan, a monstrous primordial sea serpent, which, according to the psalmist, God "made for the sport of it." Elsewhere in scripture, Leviathan appears as multi-headed, destined to be killed for food for those in the wilderness (Psalm 74:14), as a metaphor for Israel's persecutors, destined to be punished by God (Isaiah 27:1), and as an example of God's creative power (Job 41). This says a lot about how we make sense of our fears and the relationship of those fears to our Creator God. There are many monstrous things in the world and in ourselves that we're afraid of, and we consider different reasons why God, who created everything and is all good, would allow them to exist or how God might help us address them. Is it just for the sport of it or for some higher purpose?

Discussion Questions

What Leviathan heads do you recognize in your life and in the world around you?

Why do you think God put them there? How do you think God will help you deal with them?

Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Commentary from Molly Cooke

Generally, when we think about being “children of God,” there’s a positive association. We are all beloved children of God, made in God’s image, a good creation, etc. This short excerpt from the Letter to the Romans troubles that a bit with the language of suffering and slavery. After all, no parent, however hard they might try, can spare their child the inevitable pain of this world.

Paul was writing this epistle at the end of his ministry, with his persecution already underway, so he knew intimately that being adopted into God’s family didn’t lessen those inevitable pains; if anything, it exacerbated them. He wanted to acknowledge with his readers that, in this world, following the Spirit may feel like giving up one’s freedom, and following Christ might feel like it leads only to one’s suffering (just think of all the saints and apostles who were martyred!). But he also wanted to remind them that there is more to the story, more life than earthly life. All the things that make us cry out to God should also remind us that we belong to God, who loves us as a parent.

Discussion Questions

Do you relate to God as a child to a parent? Why or why not?

When was the last time you cried out to God?
How do you feel God did or did not answer?

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

²⁵ “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Commentary from Molly Cooke

In this reading, Jesus names the Holy Spirit “the Advocate,” sometimes translated as “the Paraclete,” or “the Counselor,” or “the Comforter.” This calls to mind a different characterization, that of the Devil as the *Satan*, meaning “the Accuser” or “the Adversary,” throughout the Bible. Combine this with the tradition of God being the divine judge, and we have something of a metaphorical courtroom drama. Thankfully, we know God to be a merciful and gracious judge, and we have the “Spirit of truth” on our side!

Still, the accusing voice in our minds can get to us sometimes. This is probably why Jesus reminds his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled or afraid. As a Church born through the Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost, we have the Holy Spirit to remind us of what Jesus taught and said.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever felt the Advocate and the Accuser in an argument within yourself?

How does the Holy Spirit of truth show up in your faith as an Advocate, Counselor, and/or Comforter?