

Message for the Day of Pentecost, Year C (6/5/2022)

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

“What does this mean?”

That’s the question the bystanders ask in response to the wonder that takes place in Jerusalem as described in the famous account in our first reading from Acts. The rush of the Holy Spirit like a great wind, the tongues as of flame, the sudden intelligibility of the gospel message – it’s a phenomenon worthy of the people’s reflection, to be sure.

“What does this mean?”

The Pentecost event in Acts means that the love of God made known in Jesus of Nazareth, the love that death can’t kill, is still on the loose in the world. And, it means that God’s own Spirit – the breath of life, the fire of truth – is capable of using even Jesus’ little band of followers to spread God’s word of hope to the far corners of the known world. Diversity, as it turns out, is not a barrier to the gospel, but a conduit, as the Spirit empowers the apostles to speak in multiple languages to pilgrims from near and far. And over time, the seed the apostles plant that extraordinary day takes root and flourishes, as the vine of Christ stretches from community to community with the promise of life abundant.

It’s a miracle of creativity, like the work of the Spirit in every time and place. I love the psalm assigned for today for its insistence on God’s inspiration and delight at creation: “How manifold are your works, O Lord! / In wisdom you

have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. / Yonder is the sea, great and wide, with its swarms too many to number, / living things both small and great. / There go the ships to and fro, / and Leviathan [the sea monster], which you made for the sport of it.... / You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; / and so you renew the face of the earth. / May the glory of the Lord endure forever; / O Lord, rejoice in all your works.”

This psalm, of course, isn't the first witness to the Spirit's creativity. We don't have to go any farther than the first chapters of Genesis to discover God the Spirit at work to paint the great canvas. She hovers for a moment over the primordial waters, imagining the strokes that will color the cosmos, then she leaps into action. *Let there be light*, God proclaims, and the Spirit makes it so, flinging sun, moon, and stars to the far reaches of the universe. *Let there be life*, God proclaims, and the Spirit makes it so, splashing the world with greens and blues, the lands and waters teeming with creatures of every kind – plants and plankton, slithering and swimming things, birds and beasts. *Let there be one who bears our own image*, God proclaims, and the Spirit makes it so, filling the lungs of the first human being with the breath of life.

“What does this mean?”

We're wise to ask that same question when we survey the magnitude, the miracle of the Spirit's project to make and remake the world in our time. At every Pentecost, we're wise to reflect on the boundlessness of God's creativity,

especially in light of the church's historical tendency to restrict it according to our more limited imagination.

What does Pentecost mean, friends, on the fourth anniversary of our commitment to become a Reconciling in Christ, or RIC, congregation? How shall we bear witness to the Spirit's creativity again this year? Let me insist that our unequivocal celebration of LGBTQ+ kindred and neighbors is nothing less than an act of faith, an ongoing gesture of reverence for the God whose ingenuity and grace always overflow the boundaries we set. In the name of holiness, time and again the church has codified our own categories, setting restrictive standards for belonging among the people of God. And in so doing, we've cast many aside. It's no minor harm that we've caused over the generations.

Mercifully, we're beginning to realize that our propensity to exclude has always been misguided, that we've never been God's gatekeepers. And, the sacred story that has so often been wielded as a weapon we're reclaiming as the primary witness to the wonder of the world God so loves.

Consider those chapters from the beginning of Genesis. How often have they been leveraged for the purpose of judgment and exclusion? But, look again: God made Day and Night, yes, and we have dawn and midday and late afternoon and dusk and midnight. God made the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, yes, and we have flying fish and swimming birds. God made human beings in God's own image, male and female God made them, yes, and we have cisgender women

and men and transgender women and men and neighbors at every point on the gender spectrum.

What does this mean?

Cole Arthur Riley puts it plainly: “How can anyone who is made to bear likeness to the maker of the cosmos be anything less than glory? This is inherent dignity.”¹ What a joy to celebrate the Spirit’s creativity again, friends, and what a holy privilege to affirm the dignity of every beloved child of God, and especially those whose glory has been overlooked. This Day of Pentecost and every day, may the Spirit of God rush in among us for the sake of love, just as she did that Pentecost so long ago in Jerusalem. And, may the seed we plant in our time take root and flourish, that the vine of Christ might reach out again with the promise of life abundant.

¹ *This Here Flesh*, 7.