

The Day of Pentecost, year C

May 23, 2010

Acts 2: 1-21; Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b; Romans 8: 14-17; John 14: 8-17, 25-27

Acts 2:1-21

{1} 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 nation 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, "Men of Judea 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.'

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

{24} O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. *{25}* Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. *{26}* There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. *{27}* These all look to you to give them their food in due season; *{28}* when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. *{29}* When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. *{30}* When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. *{31}* May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works-- *{32}* who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. *{33}* I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. *{34}* May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.... *{35b}* Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!

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 have 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, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

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 me 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.]

I remember hearing years ago about a Bible being marketed to teenagers. In an effort to encourage people to read the Bible and find some relevance in it, we still do that and will focus on men, women, mothers, teens, “tweens”, etc. That’s a good idea, but, in my humble opinion, when it comes to the ones for teens, at least among the ones I’ve seen, they generally tend to both “hit” and “miss” at the same time.

Anyway, the only thing I recall and know about that particular Bible, directed to teens, is the title” “The True Love Waits Bible”. My guess is that it must have had something to do with promoting abstinence prior to marriage. Ya think?

Now, that may or may not be a welcome message and good advice for you, depending on where you stand on that particular issue, but it is most definitely *not* a welcome message about or good advice for describing God’s love for us and for the world. When it comes to God, true love *definitely doesn’t wait*. Not then. Not now. Not ever.

Pentecost is a very rich festival day of the Church and there are many things that can be said. Within the Church, at least parts of it, the danger has been to make the description of that first day in *Acts* a destination rather than a launching point. We try to freeze that particular moment in time and judge our congregations by how they measure up to such a standard. For me, however, the message that stands out this year is that Pentecost is about a God who does not and will not wait.

I actually got this idea from reading more fully around the very brief passage from the *Letter to the Romans* we heard in the second reading. I’ll come back to that in a few minutes, but first a few other comments are in order.

Let me be clear, when it comes to *us*, I’m all for waiting. Sometimes we must wait because there simply is no other choice and other times it is the best course of action because it allows time and space for things to unfold and become clearer. If I recall my distant Roman Catholic training correctly, prudence is one of the “cardinal

virtues”. There is also a lot of truth in the common saying, “Discretion is the better part of valor.” Discernment can, and does, take time.

But, Pentecost is yet another reminder that God does not have to, and seldom seems to, “play by our rules”. Pentecost is God’s way of saying, “Enough! Lead, follow, or get out of the way!”

The blessedly restless Spirit of God brings order where there is chaos, chaos where there is just a bit too much order, clarity where there is confusion, new questions where there is too much certainty, hope where there is despair, new possibilities where we see only dead ends, and sisters and brothers where we see “outsiders”.

That makes me nervous. How about you?

Nervousness, this side of the story from *Acts*, is probably the best and most appropriate response to Pentecost, but we can’t let it end there. God doesn’t wait because God *loves* the world, the Church, and this congregation. God stops at nothing to make sure that message is communicated by any means necessary and to as many people as possible.

The good news is that *we* are part of what God is “up to” in the world and in the Church, but God doesn’t wait until we have it all figured out or are properly trained. The good news is that God wants to and will use us, but if we don’t want to, God will find someone else.

In the very familiar story from the *Acts of the Apostles*, most of us tend to focus on the “fireworks”. Today, however, take a look at those to whom and for whom Pentecost “happened”. You need to go to Acts 1: 12-15 to find a listing, but it included the eleven remaining apostles; Mary, mother of Jesus; “other women”; as well as, perhaps, about one hundred others. With the exception of Mary, mother of Jesus (who did, by the way, have a few of her own “moments”), and maybe some of the “other women” and believers, the apostles gathered in that upper room were colossal failures by any standards. They didn’t do all that well while on the road with Jesus, they failed miserably when Jesus was arrested and executed, and at this point in the “post-Resurrection”, “post-Ascension” story, they do not appear to be doing much better. If I were a betting person, I wouldn’t put my money on their chances for success.

There they were in that upper room, waiting and praying. Life seemed to be moving on and that “waiting thing” might have begun to get a little bit comfortable. “Just a little more time, that’s all we need.” A little more time to figure things out... A little more time to get their bearings... What’s so bad about that?

Well, you’ve heard God’s response to that.

Now, briefly, to *Romans*. The *Letter to the Romans*, according to most Bible scholars, is a “manifesto” of sorts, where St. Paul attempts to explain who God is and what God has done and is doing in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. It also has something to say about St. Paul’s role. The entire letter has an “already, but not yet” quality to it, as St. Paul grapples with the certainty of grace and of God’s love in a world that, by all appearances, is very ungraceful and uncertain.

Chapter 8, including the brief section we heard, is a celebration of such certainty in the midst of lots of questions and contradictions. Actually, chapter 7 really begins the “set up”. I’ve mentioned before that it ends with the anguished question, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Chapter 8 picks up with the statement: “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ”, and ends with, “[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The presence and power of the Holy Spirit within and among us confirms these things.

Chapters 9 through 11 ask, “What about them, then?” (“Them” meaning those among the Jewish people who didn’t see the whole “Jesus thing” in the same way as St. Paul and the other believers). Typical for a preacher, St. Paul takes *lots* of words to basically say, “Gee, I don’t really know. But, I do know that God is at work and that God is not just sitting around. God certainly is not waiting until everything is perfect and they are “ready”. God is not even waiting until we, as the church, ‘get our act together.’”

Let me use St. Paul’s own words: *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* (Romans 11: 33-36)

Pentecost. God is still at work in, among, and around us. God doesn’t wait, even when we have to.

You send forth your Spirit ...and so you renew the face of the earth.

Thanks be to God!

Come, Holy Spirit!

Amen.