

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Day of Pentecost



Year A

RCL

Numbers 11:24-30
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Acts 2:1-21

The Collect

The Collect

O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Numbers 11:24-30

Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!” But Moses said

to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!” And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Benedic, anima mea

- 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!

Acts 2:1-21

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

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes,

Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

`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.

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

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious
day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall
be saved.' "

SERMON

I'm ashamed to say it, but when I look back on my time at First Presbyterian as a child, my memories are sort of well confused, I guess you would say. We affirmed with the Creed every Sunday and I recited it with the congregation, but it was quite a long while before anyone bothered to explain to me why I believed in the Catholic church when we were Presbyterians, and the talk of the Holy Ghost totally creeped me out. As a kid, I did NOT like ghosts. But, this was the 1950's. Folks went to church because that's what folks did, and it would do you a world of good if you'd pay attention, as my grandmother used to say. My problem was that nobody was explaining to me what I ought to pay attention to, or what good it might do me.

I really don't mean to be critical of people now long dead. That was the understanding at the time – that

churches sort of oozed good medicine and if you sat in the church you'd soak it up, like a sink sponge. The idea I took from my experiences was that the Father-Son-Holy-Ghost was somewhere....up there...and didn't seem to have much to do with me, other than to make lists of everything I did and thought which were then passed on to Santa Claus. Really. I was that confused. As an adult, I mourn this.

Removing the God from the here and now to some mythic place in the sky, outside our day-to-day lives, is a tragedy. Jesus acted within the day-to-day lives of people of His time and continues to do so in the world in which we live. Reminding us that Jesus acted **and** acts within the world in which we live is the purpose of our Lenten collage. From it we are to learn that the crown of thorns as a real thing that can hurt you; we can see the bowl and pitcher and recall that Jesus – the Son

of God! knelt to wash the feet of the Disciples. Most of all, we can come face to face with the weight and the splinters and the full horror of the cross. Jesus did all these things in the here and now, in the world.

The stories of the new church aren't just things that happened to people long dead in a place far away and a time turned to dust, but represent the path of all believers as they move from unschooled disciples to empowered Apostles, able to go about their Master's work. First we mouth the words of a Creed which is meaningless to us for we have no understanding. Then, we begin to gain understanding from the stories of the Disciples recounted by our teachers. Joy was one of those teachers for me. The next step, however, is beyond human effort but must be given to us. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon the disciples.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Pentecost is an integral part of Easter. Indeed, Easter is not complete until the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This might become easier to understand if we look to the Jewish celebrations of Pesach, or Passover, and Shavu'ot or Pentecost. Our celebration of the Easter season has deep roots in Judaism. Pesach, the Passover, is the Jewish celebration of the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt just as Easter celebrates our liberation from the slavery of sin by the redeeming death and resurrection of Our Savior. Shavu'ot, celebrates the giving of Torah, the law of the Jews. It falls 50 days after Pesach and is thus called Pentecost which means “the fiftieth day”. When Luke tells us, “When the day of Pentecost had come”, he is speaking of

Shavu'ot.

The Jews see the same intimate connection between Pesach and Shavu'ot as I am urging us to see between Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost: Liberation from slavery in Egypt was not complete until the gift of the law. Liberation from sin is not complete until the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you'll accept a little mild criticism, I think the Jews do a better job of living out that connection. Orthodox Jews "count the Omer" between Pesach and Shavu'ot. An "Omer" is actually a unit of weight, but it also means the time between Pesach and Shavu'ot. They count each day, giving a blessing and saying, for instance, "Today is sixteen days, which is two weeks and two days of the Omer", thus reminding themselves daily that their release from slavery was not complete until they received God's law. That is vitally important. The children of Israel, leaving the slavery of

Egypt, were just a confused mass of people, following their leader, Moses. Not too different from the Lion's Club, but with livestock. They had no identity. They had no God calling. They were just a mob, out in the desert. They rebelled, they complained, they had mutinies. They drove Moses half nuts. It was the gift of Torah, God's law, that organized the mob into a God-led people, a people with a purpose. For that reason, Pesach and Shavu'ot have to remain connected. The one without the other is unthinkable.

But still the story is not yet complete. There was something yet to come. Joshua became alarmed that two men in the camp were prophesying, and begged Moses to make them stop. Moses replied:

“Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!”

Something is yet to come. Torah has been given. A

covenant between God and his people has been made. Still, something is yet to come. In the Gospel of John we read:

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

This is what Moses wished for – the Spirit of the Lord within the heart of all believers. The thing yet to come is the indwelling Holy Spirit, not an alien thing out there somewhere beyond the stars but God-with-us, present within the soul of a believer. This is critical. As a child at First Presbyterian, I saw myself in relation to Sam Curry in just the way the children of Israel saw themselves in relation to Moses. I was to sit quietly in the pew and listen to what Sam Curry said from the pulpit. He would tell me what I needed to know. I would have been horrified to hear anything about the Holy

Ghost dwelling within me. As I said, I did NOT like ghosts, indwelling or otherwise.

I'm older now. I believe we are charged to go out in the day-to-day world and speak the Gospel as the Spirit grants us power to do. Resurrection Sunday without Pentecost is as unthinkable as Pesach without Shavu'ot. The liberation of the children of Israel wasn't complete until they received Torah and became a God-led people. Our redemption from the slavery of sin is not complete until we have received the Holy Spirit. Until then, we're just a mob, wandering in the wilderness like the children of Israel without God's law. Our redemption is not complete until we receive the Holy Spirit, and that is what we celebrate on Pentecost.

Church, I want you to hear this. If you don't remember anything else I have told you during the Easter season, I want you to remember this: If you celebrate

Resurrection Sunday as the day our Lord was resurrected, and Pentecost as the birthday of the church, but don't live out the connection between the two, accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit into your own lives as the completion of Jesus' sacrifice, you will be like the children of Israel following Moses, complaining, mutinying, griping, wandering. If you see your role as sitting in a pew while the minister delivers speeches from the chancel, rather than accepting the Holy Spirit into your own heart, you will wander in the wilderness until you do.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The gift of the Holy Spirit was a game changer, from Follow the Leader to Lead the Follower. The Disciples, Jesus' students, were empowered and sent out as Apostles – envoys, ambassadors and messengers commissioned to carry God's message of a changed world. You are similarly sent.

“In the last days it will be”, God declares, “that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”.

Until that time, you are to devote yourself, your words, your every action, to carrying the message throughout all creation.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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