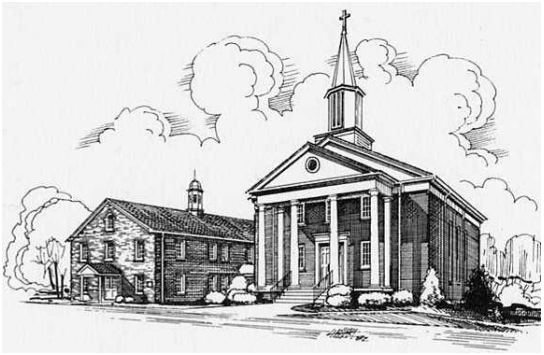
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the



Day of Pentecost

Year A

RCL

Numbers 11:24-30
Acts 2:1-21

The Collect

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may

reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ 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.

The Second Lesson

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 bewil-
dered, because each one heard them speaking
in the native language of each. Amazed and as-
tonished, 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, say-

ing 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

The first followers of Jesus were, of course, Jews. Jews celebrated (and still do) a festival called “Shavuot”. Shavuot has a double significance, agricultural and spiritual. Agriculturally, it marks the wheat harvest in the Land of Israel. Spiritually, it commemorates the anniversary of the day when God gave the Torah to the nation of Israel, binding a wandering people into a harvest known as God’s own people and bringing them into the barns of the Law which would come to distinguish them. The word Shavuot means “weeks” and its date is directly linked to that of Passover. The counting of

days and weeks between Passover and Shavuot is understood to express anticipation and desire for the giving of the Torah. The word, “Torah”, has a range of meanings. Common to all these meanings is the origin of Jewish peoplehood: their call into being by God, their trials and tribulations, and their covenant with their God[1]. When the writer of Luke-Acts writes:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place.

he is using the Greek word “Pentecost” for the Hebrew “Shavuot”, and it would be hard to imagine a more significant time within the Jewish community for these events to happen.

1 Wikipedia “Torah”

The stage is set.

> 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.

Recall our passage from Numbers:

> 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

Here we see directly the movement of God's

mighty hand. The parallel between the Numbers passage and the events in Acts is plain. It is there for us to see, if we read with understanding. What we are reading of in the account from Acts is God calling into being of a new people and the giving of a new Covenant, the New Testament.

The account presents a clear collision of cultures, one we would expect to be dismissed out of hand by the cultured and proud citizens of Rome. Bringing the Gospel into Rome must have been like yelling “Go Cats” at a University of Louisville game. The question I would pose, then, is why, within a very few decades,

were there churches of Christ all over the Roman empire and how, in the short space of 300 years, could the church of Christ conquer Rome, itself? It is God's own harvest.

How have we welcomed this harvest? Sadly, all too often, not well. Did you ever stop to think on how trouble-free it was to be a Christian in America when we were growing up? Everything in the Bible tells us that taking on the name of Christ SHOULD be a difficult and demanding thing, not a sleigh ride, but by and large, nobody gave you serious grief for being a Christian in America. Not so much for non-Christians. Kathy's cousin, Elliot, was my

childhood friend. We could play together, but he couldn't come to the Country Club to swim because he was a Jew. What? Were they afraid it would wash off? What in the world was that all about? Wasn't Jesus a Jew? Well, from the representations of Him in my Sunday School books in the 1950's, you wouldn't know it. He certainly did not look Jewish, whatever that might mean.

So, what was really going on? I think we are too slow to celebrate God's harvest of the entire world. People are social creatures. We need the company of other people just as desperately as Sookie needs the company of other dogs at

Tin Woof, but the company of just anyone won't do. We tolerate the company of other people, but we crave the company of people "like us" – our tribe. The 1950's were seriously tribal times as the civil rights trials during the 1960's and right up to today, show us. To my mind, there is no other explanation for what happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis. Do you think that had he been white that a cop would have crushed the life from him while he was cuffed and calling to his mama for mercy for nearly 9 minutes? To me it is a damning tribal moment. This is a human trait, not an American problem, and it must be extin-

guished. We must come to love all, just as God loves all, but doing so is a frightening prospect. Change inevitably involves death and tragedy. Think of the assassinations of Dr. King or President Lincoln. Yet, changing our tribal ways to more perfectly mirror the love of God is precisely what the harvest of Pentecost presaged. I think the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church that it might continue its work in the world proclaiming that all human life is sacred, and that to hate and dispute, and with violence!, is a rebuke to Christ's death and resurrection.

Taking on the name of Christ SHOULD be a

difficult and demanding thing. We would prefer it were not, as Archbishop Timothy Dolan wrote:

> **"Maybe the greatest threat to the Church is not heresy, not dissent, not secularism, not even moral relativism, but this sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms".**

The harvest at Pentecost encompassed all nations and all peoples, no matter the color of their skin. We are called away from our tribal views to see each as a child of God. We have made it too easy, I believe to huddle in our

caves and dehumanize those who look differently than do we, stripping them of their status as children of God. We are called to be the harvest of a new Covenant with the creator. Treat that call with the seriousness it demands!

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The Jews had tended the fields for thousands of years; Pentecost is a celebration of the harvest. God took some of the spirit he had put on Moses and distributed it to the seventy elders, then, on Pentecost, the spirit was distributed to the whole world. We're a mature congregation. We have walked a long walk. I'd like you to meditate this week on one question: all by themselves, do you really think a small bunch in Judea could conquer Rome in only 300 years unless they were doing the work of the Creator? Are you being a responsible part of the harvest?

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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