

Gloria Dei Meditation April 18 & 19, 2024

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

People living practically everywhere now are experiencing weather events unlike those of the past. Shear winds at the front of storms inflict much damage. In Kansas, we “keep an eye on the weather.” This spring we have experienced days on end of wind, strong wind, wind that can snap my coleus and begonias. One thing we know, wind means change is coming. We live in a dynamic world which is always changing. We cling to what we believe or what we are told to believe about the past. Somehow our structures of fifty or sixty years ago seem to look better than what the Holy Spirit might have in store for us.

And then, well, then comes Pentecost. Every year we celebrate the movement and the work of the Holy Spirit. Originally Pentecost was a Jewish thanksgiving- type festival celebrated seven weeks after the Passover. On this particular Pentecost, however, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the entire community of believers just as Jesus had promised and the scriptures had prophesied. Empowered by the Spirit, a new community is formed that points to a better way. Communication, communion, the exchange of gifts- all this does indeed happen in this text from Acts by the Spirit’s power. However, it is a communion that preserves and celebrates diversity. The story of Acts, like the story of the early church herself, is not somehow flattening diversity in the name of a single voice. Rather, the very vitality of the movement- as reflected in the exuberant details of the narrative itself- comes from its encompassing “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.” The text positively revels in diversity.

And how did the crowd accept this new paradigm of being people of faith? If we look back at the text in Acts, we see that they were perplexed and amazed. What does this mean? What do all these changes mean? How do we make sense of it? The offertory anthem this morning is an old spiritual- “Every time I feel the Spirit.” Does the Holy Spirit’s calling and nudging leave you confused? If so, you would have been right at home in that gathered assembly in Jerusalem.

I would hope for several things this morning. Let’s not relegate the work of the Holy Spirit to a certain Pentecost two millennia removed from our living. Let’s invite the Spirit to speak not only in our gathered worship, but also in our seeking hearts.

Perhaps our prayers could help shape our future. Lord, let our hearts expand. Let our minds encompass more. Let our souls grow, through meeting, enjoying, and embracing one another. We believe we’re going to spend eternity together. So, we’d best start today. Because Christianity is about living God’s future now. Life, like the church, shouldn’t be about where we’re all separately coming from. It should be about where we all together are going.

Maybe we need to lengthen our offertory procession, in which the bread, wine and gifts are brought to the altar. Imagine every tribe and race and people streaming into this church, proudly bearing the trophies and symbols and glories of their heritage and narrative and dreams. Picture each person walking up the aisle and placing those icons on the altar- each one saying, “These aren’t our identities to be protected- these are our gifts to be shared.”

Gifts are given to be a blessing. In worship, we both affirm our gifts and let go of them to allow them to be placed on the altar- to become a blessing not just to us but to all God’s people. We offer our gifts to bless each other. Identities could be affirmed and transcended. Possessions could be turned into gifts. Differences could become assets. Diversity could enrich. This model of giving and sharing could turn the water of our existence into the wine of God’s very essence and turn life into eternal life.

We can become a beacon of hope for people who are confused about change. Every Sunday we make our way to the front of the nave to receive Christ’s Body and Blood. And what we are saying

when we do this is this: we may be divided on culture wars, foreign policy, and migration, but coming forward to receive the Sacrament of Communion reminds us we are one body because we are members of Christ's body. And who we are together is more fundamental than what we think apart. The Holy Spirit is giving us the power to witness to the whole world about our fundamental identity as Christ's body, an identity that transcends all divisions. By constantly witnessing to that identity in Christ we are doing something critically important to us, our nation, and our world. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.