Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for June 9, 2019
Pentecost

THE READINGS


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.

Worth Noting: Using the words of the prophet Joel, Acts proclaims the coming of the Lord's Spirit upon all, regardless of age, gender, class, or nationality. This foreshadows the whole of Acts, as the Spirit drives the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Look around you now, wherever you are reading this: What is the Spirit doing right now, right there, among the people of every age, race, and class you can see? Or has the Spirit withdrawn from the world?

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
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!
Worth Noting: The psalmist proclaims the LORD’s power over the terrors and monsters of the sea. What are the biggest fears in your community? Inhabitants of Jerusalem (say) could avoid the sea and its dangers. How do you avoid the greatest terror in your life?

Second Reading: Romans 8:14-17 Alternative Acts 2:1-21
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, 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.

Worth Noting: First: Nope! Abba does not mean “daddy.” It means father. Only term available for an adult to address the head of household. Second: Adoption was not a second-class filiation. Indeed, Julius Caesar adopted Octavius as his son and heir, and Octavius became Caesar Augustus. He continued the practice adopting Tiberius and so it went throughout the time of the Empire. For God to adopt us is for God to declare we are his daughters and sons, heirs to divinity. If we are of God’s family, what are our marks? How did being the Son of God work out for Jesus of Nazareth? To what is the Spirit leading you and your community?

Gospel: John 14:8-17 [25-27]
8 Philip said to him [Jesus], “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.”]
CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES
Entering into the Scriptures

Luke’s usually tight Greek and compositional brilliance fall apart a bit in Acts 2:1-21, the first reading. For instance, who are we to understand are the “all” gathered on Pentecost? One important family of texts refers to the twelve apostles receiving the tongues of fire. Other texts have the ambiguity of our translation.

Nor is it clear how the people were listening to the apostles – was the miracle not one of speaking many tongues but of hearing one’s own language spoken? And how did people from around the world recognize that the apostles were speaking (whatever they were speaking) with Galilean accents? Why was Peter “standing with the eleven” (Acts 2:14) when the community had just chosen Matthias to take Judas’ place and restored the college of apostles to twelve (Acts 1:26)? Why would people from Judea (Acts 2:8) find it confusing that there were Galileans speaking to them? Why do no places in Greece or Macedonia appear, (especially as this is where Paul spends a great deal of his time later)? And just exactly what did the Twelve or the One Hundred Twenty (Acts 1:15) proclaim? Peter’s speech provides the first of the many summary statements of the Gospel that appears in Acts. Was he duplicating what had been said earlier? And the list of nations seems to reflect a catalogue from approximately 150 years earlier, when it roughly (very roughly) coincides with the kingdoms descended from Alexander the Great.

Careful readers believe that Luke constructed the Pentecost account in Acts 2:1-21 from a variety of older sources. The festival itself (referenced in Hebrew as הב שבעות, “festival of weeks” being seven weeks, a week of weeks, from Passover) combined a spring festival with a remembrance of the Sinai appearance of God and the establishment of a new covenant.

Luke may have taken a story of ecstatic speech by the apostles and converted it into an instance when the listeners miraculously translated their words. In this, Luke would be following 1 Corinthians in distrust of speaking in tongues. Haste in composition may have resulted in the confusion of the scene. On the other hand, confusion may have been Luke’s goal. Out of this confusion comes a community setting out to change the world.

“The Spirit is Amovin’ All Over This Land”

In the mid-nineteenth century the abolitionist minister Theodore Parker proclaimed that the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice. More recent speakers note that the moral universe does not bend easily to the human will, but bend it does.

The Church celebrates Pentecost, noting the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Though Jesus promised his disciples peace, no enumeration of the gifts of the Spirit includes peace, or justice, or happiness. Rather the gifts prepare the recipient for the work ahead, the work to make sure that the arc of the universe does indeed bend toward justice. To make that happen requires all the gifts one can bring to bear, plus enough forbearance and humor to induce others to join the venture.

Questions for Discussion

Can you describe a time when you witnessed the Spirit acting in the world? How did
you discern that it was the Spirit of God and not a spirit of evil?

When and where do you see the Spirit moving today? We tend to decry and condemn many human institutions: religious, political, charitable, educational; local, national, international. You get the picture. What could the Spirit be doing with them?

I find most admirable and most counter-cultural in our quick-fix world the gift of fortitude, the gift to stick with a vocation, or a ministry, or a program through setbacks and failures. Not surprisingly, fortitude is the gift I most lack. What is the gift of the Holy Spirit you need most today?

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