

Pentecost/Whitsunday

Acts 2

John 14:15-21

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen+

As it has been throughout these 50 days of Easter, today we again are surrounded by the sounds and melodies of St. John’s intricate message of the fulfillment of Jesus’ life for us and now within us. Verses 15-17 run parallel to verses 18-21 each telling us to love Jesus, keep his commandment to love one another, the promise of his return in the Advocate, and finally how we will both recognize him through the Spirit and his living in us as well. John is giving us a double dose like the writer of a great Fugue, so that it will “stick”. “I will not leave you orphaned”; watch and see what I have for you! That is the promise and we stake our existence on it. So we watch and listen.

On May 29th we came to the 104th anniversary of the premiere of a new and Avant-guard composition offered up in Paris. It was Stravinsky’s, *The Rite of Spring*. Reportedly it led to a riot and open fighting even amidst the elite snobbery of artistic Paris. To the untrained, and perhaps even the trained ear, it is raucous, strident, un-melodic, and without even a hint of the human qualities of warmth or compassion. Even the ballet attendant to it is discordant in movement. I very nearly failed a Music Appreciation class in college due to my description of it for the professor on an exam. As I recall, when asked to assess the work I wrote, “In the words of Dr. Seuss’s Grinch, “Noise, noise, noise, noise; Oh the noise.” It was certainly not polyphony or harmony, but cacophony.

What has that to do with Pentecost or Whitsunday, named after the color, white, because the best vestments and altar coverings were used and normally were white or gold? Look at Luke’s account in Acts, with its reversal of the Tower of Babel, and the Gospel today. What tensions do you see? In Acts it is people from everywhere hearing God’s activity, while the larger population sees nothing but men who have had much to drink. Both groups are looking at the same event, but hearing very different tunes. And in John we have our Lord promising his eternal gift, and yet a world is present that cannot recognize or see that gift. This day, which brings Easter to its apogee and climax, places before us the dualities and tensions of either seeing and living in harmony with God’s presence, or being in the discordant confusing world where life is lived out with every person for themselves, and harmony is more of an accident than the gift of peace which God gives.

I suggested earlier this week that there are at least 2 narratives within which we can live. A narrative is a story, a tune, an identity that plays or runs through our hearts, minds, souls, and becomes the controlling image of our life journeys. It becomes the way we see ourselves and others. It is either the background noise of self-interest, or the beautiful harmony of Jesus encasing life, and we return to it regularly to give us our bearings. These are the dualities in the Scriptures today. What we really are hearing and encountering are two ways of being human in this world.

The first is filled with unrest and distraction. The world in which I move seems to be one of endless noise and competing claims. (There is a current commercial for spectrum TV—“Things cannot make us happy, BUT with spectacular things we forget what makes us unhappy, so...”) Is there actually anyone here today who cannot say that at times life becomes flat, monotonous, and one-dimensional? We become overwhelmed with the ordinariness and sameness of days that run together and seem all too common. We are marked from time to time with personal emptiness, personal pride, and too easily have amnesia, that is, we forget the big and small ways God has been

present to us. We listen to the wrong voices from our culture, our past, and even from ourselves that skew the image we have of what is important, and somehow, in all of that, God's deep love for us becomes lost. One of the English Divines wrote of this struggle in his life. In a lamentation he prayed, "O God, where Lazarus was for 3 days, I have been for 40 years. Dear Lord I need a bit of your thunder and lightning". We might not use such language in this day and time, but the meaning is certainly familiar. It is what St. John means when he refers in his Gospel to "The World". It is the world estranged from God. It cannot receive the Spirit and remain unchanged, disinterested or aloof.

But there is another melody being sung for us. It is the music of God who calls us out of ourselves, away from chaotic chatter and useless pursuits to **connection**: with the God who seeks to awaken us to His presence and dwell in us: with the Spirit of the resurrected Christ who remains with us and remains a constant gift of hope: with one another in love, sustenance, and service to all who need the grace and care the world has not bestowed. (Spirit of Truth—A-lethia in Greek.) Lethia was river in Hades from which the dead drank. A-lethia is the opposite. It is be awakened; to arise from deadness to the truth which Jesus embodies.

What is the music of God that we call Pentecost? What is its sound? I think it sounds and looks like an Advocate who walks along side and with so that no trial, or danger, or persecution can separate us from God's love. I think it sounds and looks like Jesus who refused to avoid suffering and death in order to defeat what we cannot, and therefore is our Advocate. I think it looks like Truth: an awakening to life and energy and joy that comes from being God's children.

Let me surprise you all and move away for a moment from high sounding theological descriptions and be concrete. (Yes, catch your collective breath). The life and gift of the Holy Spirit likely looks an awful lot like you...When you support, stand with, uphold, nurture others with love of Jesus, perhaps when they/we can do none of that for themselves. Think about the reality of that! Why would God use us in that fashion? Ask yourself why would anyone believe in a Jesus they cannot see, behold, or hear? No one would unless they are led by the Holy Spirit's activity, and just perhaps that activity is in fallible vessels where Jesus becomes known. Thus the term Advocate—one who assists along the way.

We trust God and come to hope thru the Spirit's work. It is like being in love. There is no such thing as love in the theoretical or abstract. Love in those ways can be called day dreaming or infatuation, or even a pleasant distraction, but real love only exists when 2 people intertwine lives and are willing to allow themselves to be affected and altered by mutual life giving energy. Life lived in the Spirit is coming to see and hear, behind the apparent and too often mundane, a deeper song where the life of Jesus lends joy and exuberance and energy TO US.

Pentecost is not the 50th day after Easter...It is the 50 days of Easter where the full joy and recognition of what Jesus accomplished becomes the tune in your head that you cannot forget or turn off!! On this day we pray, "Send your Holy Spirit: the longed for guest of our hearts." Amen+