

Pentecost/Whitsunday

Acts 2

John 14:15-21

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

We come to this great festival day of Whitsunday. The historic title of the day was due to the early church practice of having those who have been regenerate in Baptism (and likely just confirmed or anointed), redeemed from the brokenness of sin and death, wear white robes. It was a sign of not only innocence and purity, but of **new life** in the risen Christ.

Now we tend to use the name Pentecost to identify the day. That name comes from the word for 50, designating this as the fiftieth day of EASTER. You see Easter, like Christmas, is more than a single day. It is true that the great feast of Easter lands us on a particular day. It is the day when death is defeated, or as St. John Chrysostum said, ‘it was when hell took a body, and discovered God.’ And yet there is more... What is the opposite of dying and death...living and life! This is a season of life, a pathway meant to take us on a journey which leads us into being alive in God. “‘I will send you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth who will abide with you forever...and will be in you’. Even as this is on occasion called the ‘birthday of the Church’, it is really a birthday for us; a day of new life where we become capable of Divine life and not just mundane existence. Ears and eyes, hands and hearts can become open to being truly alive. Do you remember Gerard Manly Hopkins poetry?

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;...

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

To be alive in God is to see what truth is, to not be distracted by the insignificant or that which takes away from love of God or our neighbor. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the way God invites us to be part of weaving the fabric of life in our community so that the gifts of joy, peace, forgiveness, knowledge, and wisdom guide us ever. There is a type of harmony created by the

Spirit that puts us in synch with God and each other. It is the exact opposite of the story of Babel in Genesis where discord prevents people from seeing God's presence.

Last summer I officiated at the wedding of the daughter of a Twin Lakes' resident. It was a wonderful sacrament and time. Over dinner we sat at the table with a gentleman (physician) who had been instrumental (no pun intended) in starting the Easter Music Festival, which annually brings musicians from around the globe to meet and play in Greensboro. In conversation he discovered we loved music as well and he graciously invited us to the final performance of the season later that same evening. Two pieces were on the program that night. The first was Brahms' concerto for violin and orchestra, and the soloist did a magnificent job—it was melodic! The second production, however, was Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring". The word "melody" is not quite descriptive. It was raucous, strident, and discordant, without even a hint of the human qualities of warmth or compassion. We looked for the nearest way out, but were trapped mid-row. These two opposites are audible examples of Whitsunday, on the one hand, and Babel on the other. 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 Whitsun? 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 the love of Jesus, perhaps when they can do none of that for themselves. Maybe it is like falling in love and the voice of the beloved sounds not like information being shared, but is presence, assurance, and a link to true life. 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/Whitsunday 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

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St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

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cannot forget or turn off!! On this day we pray, "Send your Holy Spirit: the longed for guest of our hearts." Amen+