

Pentecost Reflections

May 20, 2018

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Hello Artisan Church podcast listeners, this is Pastor Scott Austin I wanted to give you a little heads up this week as to why the podcast is a little bit shorter than usual. We had a special time of sharing in our service on Sunday and during that time of sharing people shared some pretty personal and intimate stuff. So in order to make that a safe place for people to do that, we promised that we wouldn't post it to the podcast and so we're not going to do that. So what you're getting this week is just my brief intro thoughts about the Day of Pentecost, which I hope you will still enjoy, and next week we'll be back with a full length (probably longer than you want it to be) sermon. Thanks again for listening and for supporting Artisan Church and I hope you enjoy.

[Beginning of Transcript. Voice of Pastor Scott]

So today is the day that we celebrate Pentecost. Pentecost is a Christian holiday where we remember and celebrate the receiving of the Holy Spirit. And for some people, it's a nice way to mark, if you will, the birthday of the church. This event happened early on in the church's history and was like the beginning of their mission to bring the good news of salvation to the whole known world. So we think of Pentecost as a Christian holiday but the truth is it's actually a Jewish holiday before it was a Christian holiday. The word Pentecost is a Greek word that came to be associated with a Jewish celebration called the Feast of Weeks, and that happened fifty days after Passover. And so Pentecost means fifty, or fiftieth.

The Feast of Weeks was a Jewish holiday where they would celebrate the wheat harvest; it was agricultural, kind of like marking the times of the year, you know, like we have the Lilac Festival [crowd laughs]. And it's like, okay, winter is now over. It's definitely not going to snow again [laughs]. This was an agricultural thing marking the time of the year. But also the Feast of Weeks, known by the Greeks because there's Pentecost, was a celebration of the anniversary of the Israelites receiving Torah. And that occasion, if you know the old story in the Old Testament, was when Moses went up on Mount Sinai and received the Law the Ten

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Commandments and then later on, the whole of the Jewish Law. So essentially, the Feast of Weeks was for Jewish believers kind of like Bible anniversary day — we get the whole scriptures to celebrate on that day. And it was one of three festivals in Jewish faith at the time of Jesus that were deemed important enough that Jews would actually make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem from the whole Greco Roman Empire. They would go come from all over the “diaspora,” it’s called. The dispersion, the scattered peoples of Israel would come back to Jerusalem for this day. And it was on that occasion when the Jewish believers were gathered together, and some of them had become Christians, when the Holy Spirit descended. And we’ll read the story in a minute but for Christians the Day of Pentecost becomes a day when we celebrate the Holy Spirit, whereas for Jews it was a day of celebrating, essentially, the scriptures — the Law, Torah.

It’s really fascinating to me that these things happened at the same time because if you know the story of the early church as told in the book of Acts and in the letters of the apostles, this was a major struggle for them. How do we determine when the Holy Spirit seems to be doing something that does not square with the way that we have always read the Bible? It’s like basically the story of the book of Acts. The apostles, the followers of Jesus, had to deal with this over and over and over again and it almost always involve some type of inclusion. The Holy Spirit seemed to want to include people who, their interpretation of scriptures told them, should not be included, and they had to decide what to do. Almost all the tension in the early church was trying to sort out things like that.

So we’re going to be thinking about Pentecost and the Holy Spirit today, and to get us started I want to read today’s lectionary passage from the Book of Acts, which I don’t think I have a slide for, but it’s Acts chapter two. So in your red Bibles, I’ll give you a page number here real quick. Sword drill [laughter]. Eight eighty five in the red Bibles if you’d like to follow along. If you have your own Bible of course you can find Acts chapter two, and if you just Google “Acts 2” on your phone it will come up. It might not be the same translation but it’ll get you close. If you don’t own a Bible please take one of these red ones home. You can see there’s a whole library cart full of them at the back of the room. We buy them so that you can have them. So this is all about what happened when that multicultural, multilingual crowd of Jewish faithful believers came to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, the harvest of wheat, and the giving of the law. Acts 2:1-21:

“When the day of Pentecost had come they 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

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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 bewildered because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”

Okay, I need to pause right here. The translators are doing something which I think is admirable and important. They are trying to translate this that has gendered pronouns in Greek into a way that includes not just men, basically. And they've done it in a very clunky way so if that sentence didn't sound very smooth it's because they're trying to do the right thing in the wrong way, in my opinion. Basically it just means that everybody heard the people speaking in their own language even though it wasn't the language of those speakers should have spoken. Okay, verse 7: “Amazed and astonished they asked, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”

Now, this is kind of a way of saying, aren't all those people from Henrietta? How would they know? [laughter]. Okay, in the first service I said Greece and everybody thought I meant like [the nation of] Greece. I really just meant [the town of] Greece. [laughter] And I promised all the Greece people in the first service that I would insult the people from Henrietta in the second service. Of course none of us snobby urban city dwellers ever get offended by these tricks [laughter]. At any rate, the Galileans were kind of like, a little bit lower intelligence and stature so it's kind of weird to the people that they're speaking foreign languages.

“How is it that we hear each of us in our own native language; Parthians, Medes, Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia” etc., etc., cities and cities. Both Jews and proselytes, “Cretans and Arabs in their own language. We hear them speaking about God's deeds of power. All were amazed and perplexed saying 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 they are not drunk as you suppose for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.’ [pause, laughter]

You know, Artisan, one of these Pentecost Sundays I'm going to read this text in you're not going to giggle and chortle when I get to that verse. Maybe Jesus will come back first. See, I was raised in a church tradition that was very anti-drinking, like you couldn't drink socially. There was no drinking at all, as far as anybody, knew and you weren't supposed to touch alcohol. I don't know how they interpret what this means because he didn't say, “They're not drunk because they would never touch alcohol,” he said, “They're not drunk because 9 in the morning.” At any rate, isn't the Bible fun? [laughs] I love the Bible so much.

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“Know this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,” and here he's going to quote from the Old Testament 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 smoking mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and moon to blood before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of Lord shall be saved.”

You know, when you have a religion that's very culturally conditioned that it's actually hereditary, the idea that everyone would be saved is not really baked into that equation. The idea that everybody could call in the name of the Holy God of Israel is not really what's to be expected. So if you've been around Artisan for much time you've probably heard me use this phrase, “a leveling of the playing field.” I like to talk about this in a bunch of different ways. I often think of the first story of creation in Genesis where it says God made humankind in God's image and likeness. The goes for every person. Every human being who lives or ever has lived, or ever will live is made in the image of God. It doesn't matter who you, it doesn't matter what your gender is, it doesn't matter how old or young you are. It doesn't matter how rich or poor you are, it doesn't matter if you're a law abiding citizen or the most hardened criminal. You are not an animal, you are a human being made in the image and likeness of the God of the universe. That's a leveling of the playing field. There is nothing any one of us can say to the other and say, I am more than you in that way because we all have it. We all have all of it. And yes, it gets distorted and fractured and hard to perceive, but as a leveling of the playing field the fact that humankind is made in God's image.

I also say it about communion. I might remember to say it when I introduce coming in later in the service. Communion is a leveling of the playing field that each one of us is invited to partake of the grace on offer in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is the Lord's table, not the church's table, not the pastor's table, not the leadership team's table, not the denomination's table. It doesn't matter who you are where you come from if you're seeking to follow Jesus, Jesus offers this table; this the body and blood of his own for you. It's a leveling of the playing field, and I use that phrase also about what we see in today's story. The story of the Holy Spirit descending on these Christian believers in this upper room on the day of Pentecost. When the whole religion had gathered in the city to witness it. They didn't know that was what they were there to witness but this is what they ended up witnessing. It fulfilled what was told in the prophet Joel, which God said in so many words through the prophet Joel, I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people, on all flesh. On all bodies. Every individual person will be able to receive the

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Holy Spirit. Men, women, young, old, rich, poor, slave, free. Everyone gets access to the power of God through the Holy Spirit.

And while yes it is true that that same Spirit offers to each of us unique gifts for the edification of the Body of Christ, we're not all the same. Wouldn't that be boring if we were all the same? If everybody only had my gifts or Brittany's gifts or Melody's gifts or Matt's gifts. That would be boring. We all have these different gifts that come from that same spirit, but we've all received it from the same spirit. We would do well to remember that every person could at any moment become a conduit of God's words for us. I think sometimes we rule people out of that possibility for one reason or another. And we miss what God might have to say because God doesn't always speak through the people you might expect God to speak through, like the important ones.

I'm going to invite you now to come and take communion. As I said earlier this is a leveling of the playing field. Jesus offers his body and blood for the salvation of the whole world. If you're seeking to follow him and trusting Him in all your ways this table is open for you whether you feel very very accomplished in faith or very very very inexperienced and incompetent. By the way, that's the better one to be. So if you don't want to take communion or if you do and you'd also like to receive prayer we have a member of the prayer team in the back of the room who would be happy to pray with anyone who'd like to receive prayer today. We're going to road test a brand new song with you while we take communion. It's a communion song and it's not intended to be one that you can sing probably on your first try so let's see if that works.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com