

HOMILY  
PENTECOST  
ACTS 2: 1-21

GREETING, ETC.

THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS ALWAYS CONFOUNDED ME. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE HOLY SPIRIT IN RELATION TO GOD AND JESUS? HOW DOES ONE DESCRIBE THE HOLY SPIRIT? WE HAVE JUST HEARD THE MOST PONDERED NARRATIVE (AT LEAST AMONG BIBLICAL SCHOLARS) OF THE BOOK OF ACTS. IT IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE MOST FAMILIAR AND PROVOCATIVE NARRATIVES FOR US NON-BIBLICAL SCHOLARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY. AND THE ACTS NARRATIVE IN SOME MEASURE ADDRESSES MY OPENING QUESTIONS. FOR AS WE HEARD, IT IS NOT EASILY UNDERSTOOD. ALLOW ME TO RECOUNT IT AGAIN WITH SOME ANNOTATION.

IT IS 50 DAYS AFTER THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS; IT IS THE JEWISH FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST, WHEN THE FRUITS OF THE WHEAT HARVEST ARE PRESENTED TO GOD IN JOYFUL CELEBRATION. THE APOSTLES HAVE GATHERED IN A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM. OTHERS WHO FOLLOW JESUS WERE WITH THEM, SOME SAY AS MANY AS A 120. SUDDENLY THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH THE SOUND OF A VIOLENT WIND. THIS MUST HAVE BEEN A TERRIFYING

EXPERIENCE FOR THEM. I RECALL VIVIDLY IN THE 1980'S WHEN HURRICANE GLORIA CAME THROUGH HARTFORD AND HOW THE SOUND OF THE WIND UNNERVED ME AS I HUDDLED IN MY APARTMENT. THUS I AND I AM SURE MANY OF YOU CAN EASILY IMAGINE THE ANXIETY AND FRIGHT THAT OVERWHELMED THEM. BUT NOTE THAT IT IS THE SOUND OF THE WIND, AND NOT WIND THAT FILLS THE HOUSE.

THEN DIVIDED TONGUES, AS OF FIRE, RESTED ON EACH. I THINK IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT IT IS NOT DISTINCTLY TONGUES OF FIRE, BUT AS OF FIRE-DESCRIBING THE TONGUES AS SPREADING LIKE FIRE AMONG THE BELIEVERS. "ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES, AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM THE ABILITY." THE SOUND BROUGHT "DEVOUT JEWS FROM EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN" WHO WERE LIVING IN JERUSALEM. AND, BECAUSE THEY HEARD THEIR OWN NATIVE LANGUAGES FROM A GROUP OF GALILEANS THEY WERE AMAZED AND ASTONISHED. THEY RECOGNIZE THEM AS GALILIEANS FROM THEIR DIALECT AND ARE FURTHER ASTONISHED THAT THESE UNSOPHISTICATED IGNORANT PEOPLE ARE SPEAKING OF THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD IN SO MANY LANGUAGES.

THOSE DEVOUT JEWS WERE "AMAZED AND PERPLEXED."

MANY SUNDAYS I AM REMINDED OF HOW MY DAILY PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE PRESENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER GOD'S TEACHINGS THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES. FOR EXAMPLE WITH TODAY'S READING I AM REMINDED OF A PARTICULAR EXPERIENCE FROM A FEW YEARS AGO. I HAD BEEN APPOINTED TO HEAD A COMMITTEE FOR THE JUDICIAL BRANCH - THE COMMITTEE'S CHARGE WAS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN CT. IN FULFILLING THAT CHARGE, WE DETERMINED THERE WAS AN URGENT NEED TO PROVIDE MORE INTERPRETERS TO BE AVAILABLE IN OUR COURTS TO ASSIST NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING PARTIES. WE NOW HAVE INTERPRETERS AVAILABLE IN 144 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. COURT IS OFTEN A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS-FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF CRIMES, THOSE BEING SUED, THOSE BRINGING SUIT, WITNESSES, JURORS AND I DARESAY EVEN ATTORNEYS; THE JARGON AND PROCEDURE ARE UNFAMILIAR AND NOT EASILY UNDERSTOOD. ADD TO THAT AN INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND OR TO SPEAK ENGLISH. FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS WHAT I HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER JUDGES, WITHOUT THE ABILITY TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND TO UNDERSTAND THERE CAN BE NO JUSTICE. ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS A BIG THING BUT IT IS CERTAINLY NOT ON A PAR WITH SPREADING THE WORD OF GOD. BUT AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, WE

APPLY GOD'S TEACHINGS TO OUR DAILY LIVES, IN WHATEVER CONTEXT WE EXPERIENCE. THUS I TAKE COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT AS GOD'S WORD SHALL BE SPREAD BY THOSE FROM "EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN," OUR COURTS SERVE PEOPLE OF EVERY RACE AND NATION.

RETURNING TO THE STORY, WHILE THOSE HEARING THE SOUND OF THE WIND AND THE VOICES OF SO MANY DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, SOME REACTED BY CLAIMING THAT IT WAS THE RESULT OF "BEING FILLED WITH NEW WINE." PETER, A/K/A THE ROCK, IMMEDIATELY RESPONDS TO SAY THEY ARE NOT DRUNK; AFTER ALL IT'S ONLY 9 A.M.- JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF WRY BIBLICAL HUMOR. BUT THEN HE GETS SERIOUS AND EXPLAINS, THE PROPHET JOEL TOLD US THAT "GOD DECLARES THAT I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH, AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY." AND NOT ONLY UPON SONS AND DAUGHTERS, BUT UPON SLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN. AND ALL WHO CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED. SO WOMEN AND MEN OF EVERY RACE, NATION AND STATION IN LIFE SHALL RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I EARLIER REFERRED TO THE SOUND OF THE WIND AND THE TONGUES AS OF FIRE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO TAKE CARE IN READING THESE ACCURATELY. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NEITHER A VIOLENT WIND NOR IS IT TONGUES OF FIRE. TO ME, IT

IS MORE COMPELLING THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT DOES NOT APPEAR AS A NATURAL ELEMENT. IT DOES NOT FIT A CONVENIENT DESCRIPTION. IT MAY COME TO US IN DIFFERENT MANNERS AND FORMS. ACTS TELLS US THAT LIKE THE AMAZED AND PERPLEXED DEVOUT JEWS OF THE NARRATIVE WE MUST EXPECT STARTLING AND NEW WAYS TO SPREAD THE WORD OF GOD. AND WE MUST RESIST IMMEDIATELY EXPLAINING AWAY THESE NEW AND STARTLING EVENTS WITH STANDBY EXCUSES. WHAT A CHALLENGE FOR MANY OF US. BECAUSE THE FAMILIAR IS SO COMFORTABLE. QUOTE FROM PRAYER FOR CHANGE?