

The Day of Pentecost. Acts 2: 1-21 St. Augustine's, Freeland WA Nigel Taber-Hamilton

It's not at all uncommon, on this day, to see a link between the passage in the Acts of the Apostles and Genesis 11 - which begins with the story of the tower of Babel. In the many confusing tongues being heard as one, discernable voice it appears that the Spirit is reversing Babel.

Okay. But there are even stronger connections with other Old Testament passages that we're inclined to miss.

Firstly, do you remember what the most obvious markers of Pentecost are, other than the "with one voice" bit? We all remember the tongues of flame - they're often mirrored in vestments, or the use of the colors of the orange-red range (like on the wall behind me!). But the other thing that happens isn't always remembered so clearly - the mighty sound, like the rushing of a wind!

Where have you heard that in the Old Testament? How about Genesis 1? The breath, the "Ruach" of God moved over the face of the deep! Okay, that was an easy one! What about sound and light combined? Exodus 19 - up on the Holy Mountain; Judges (5:4-5), the psalms (18 & 29) - and the list goes on!

So - yes - Luke could be thinking of the reversal of Babel, but he's certainly thinking of these other moments - moments when God manifests God's Self in what in theological terms is called a theophany, a revealing of God.

And he's thinking about this new moment as somehow mirroring both the moment of creation and the giving of the Teaching, except it's not so much of a mirror, more of a **new** moment of creation, a giving of **new** version of the teaching.

This new moment of creation and giving of a new version of the teaching creates a new community, one that was, according to Luke, unlike the one that preceded it.

To underscore this newness Luke quotes Joel 3:1-5, which begins "For....in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem." But Luke's description of that restoration is significantly different from that event described by Joel.

And actually it's not that much like the ones that followed it, either. This first community was **gender inclusive**: "your sons" and "your daughters" (2:17); "servants -- both male and female" (2:18). It is **age inclusive**: "your young people" and "your old people" (2:17). And if we are to take seriously the opening ("all people") of this citation, then this community is also **destined to be ethnically inclusive**.

This mirrors what Paul claims in Galatians (3:28) "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*"

So from Acts AND Paul there are four obvious markers of community: one that's free, gender inclusive, age inclusive, ethnically inclusive. We do struggle still with those last three, don't we?! Unlike the realities in ages past, or the realities in other churches, we aren't intentionally exclusive in any of those three, but we're not completely inclusive in those three either.

Being inclusive isn't easy; in fact its down right hard sometimes. Men are not that great at recognizing when we're being patriarchal. Sometimes we're better than others, but we could do better.

And the Church claims not to have an age bias, but take if from someone past 60 – there's an age bias! Again, sometimes we're better than others, but we could do better.

And the same is true with ethnic inclusivity. We could do better.

The thing that offers us hope is today, the gift from God for the people of God – the Spirit. Paul identifies how that works: *“all of you are [now] on in Christ Jesus”* and you find that unity through baptism.

When we're at the font in just a minute we will all be proclaiming that unity and committing ourselves to that inclusive community of Christ.

Most of you have heard me say that in the early Church baptism didn't involve children or infants until Augustine of Hippo opined three hundred years after Jesus that unbaptized infants and children hadn't had their original sin washed away and would therefore go to hell if they died unbaptized – well guess what happened in the Church when that idea took hold?! Baptism for infants and children.

In many ways that's a great shame. Baptism stopped being a joining and committing rite and became something that had more of the air of magic. That's why we have reaffirmation and renewal of baptismal vows – an opportunity to reaffirm the promises taken on our behalf at baptism.

Renewing those promises is what we do four or five times a year – we should really be doing it more often. The five promises remind us of our commitment:

To continue living a life modeled on the central teachings of Jesus and Paul, which includes the central act of Christian worship: Eucharist.

To remember that we are capable of falling short of the ethical and moral standards, the authentic living, that following Jesus demands of us AND to commit to turning back to those standards and that living when we fall short.

To share with others by our personal example what a life lived in this holy way looks like, adding our words of explanation only if necessary.

To live our lives out of a love for all creation, for others, and for ourselves,

And to live our lives striving for justice and for peace – actively, intentionally, consistently – respecting every person’s God-given dignity.

That’s the basis for Christian community and holy lives that this day both celebrates and promotes.

“Promoting something means speaking and acting on behalf of something”. In other words, it’s not saying “well, it’s a lovely idea” and leaving it at that. It’s saying “here are some directions”, and outline, if you will, for a journey.

One final, but very important thing. In the New Testament there are two primary models for “Church”. One comes from the authentic Paul and the Acts of the Apostles passage we have today. The other comes from the Pastoral Epistles: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus – non-Pauline letters.

- The Pastoral letters are hierarchical, and they focus on ordained ministry: bishops, priests and deacons. The model is like a pyramid, with authority and leadership top-down, and where those expected to be the actors, the ones who do stuff, are the ordained. Everyone else is a watcher - passive.
- The second model is from Paul and Acts. It’s mutual, inclusive and non-hierarchical. Authority and leadership are shared. Everyone is expected to share in leadership, authority, AND action. We’re in this together. That model is like a circle, and we’re ALL CIRCLE KEEPERS – we all have a responsibility for maintaining the circle, and acting from that circle.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that an institution might choose the former! Our faith demands we choose the latter.

So let’s celebrate this gift of the Spirit, and celebrate the Birthday of the Church – as this day is often called – and then get to work on living out the vision!