

The Day of Pentecost, June 4, 2017 St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA igel Taber-Hamilton Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13, John 20:19-23

Throughout his life as reported in the gospels, Jesus was clear about the challenge he saw before him: that the faith of his forebears – the faith he had inherited and treasured – had been domesticated. The richness had been watered-down, the teeth had been drawn, the fiery challenge had been extinguished. He saw as a soporific, a sleepy faith that lacked the energy and commitment to inaugurate the sort of transformation he believed was necessary.

What do you do when you want to wake someone up – what do you have to do? What about trying to wake up a whole people? Jesus' strategy was to ask outrageous questions, tell outrageous stories, perform outrageous acts – words and deeds that violated the norms of his culture and his time, that boxed his listeners in, that forced them to decide if they were for his vision of true faith or against it. Not for him or against him – though that's often how it seemed to work out – but for or against the vision revealed by the in-breaking power of God into every human life. It there's a mantra, a repeated chant, at the heart of all that Jesus said, it's this: "Choose! Choose! Choose....!"

So to paraphrase a well-known aphorism: "if you're not continually shocked by Jesus words and deeds, you're not listening, you're not watching, you're not paying attention!"

Today – ironically – is both the day when Jesus' mantra – "Choose! Choose! Choose....!" – most obviously and persistently demands an answer from us, and also the day that does so not in his presence but most notably in his absence. In fact, it's his absence that makes our answer so important and so central.

This is not, of course, how this day is often presented! Most often, it can seem as if the Day of Pentecost is about something 'done' to a group of disciples newly separated from their mentor, leader, teacher, and friend. In this telling, we're let off the hook, we're simply onlookers, separated by great time and distance from the events of Pentecost, from whom nothing is demanded but attention and applause.

What we so often forget is that the disciples' presence in Jerusalem at that festival was predicated on the fact that they had just made an active choice: they listened to Jesus' departing words – reinforced by the messengers' gentle prodding not to engage in navel-gazing. On some level they all realized that the experience of resurrection confronted them with a choice, and to choose requires a decision; to decide demands also a response – an action or actions. And actions have consequences.

We tend to miss that choice because while it clearly existed for the disciples, their experience of Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection, made it an easy one to make: they headed for Jerusalem and awaited the promised gift that they knew in their bones would soon be theirs.

It's harder for us. That old explanation often shared when trying to explain an experience rings true here: "you had to be there." We haven't – most of us, anyway! – had the luxury of hearing

Jesus's words directly, or even of being prodded by divine messengers! So today is much more of a challenge for us than it was for them. "Are you for God's vision? We're asked? "And if you are, will you act on it?" And we pause.....

The thing is, today leaves us no room for maneuver when confronted with the demand to choose whether we are for Jesus' vision of true faith or against it; as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act," to which the obvious can be added: "not to choose is to choose."

So what's happening *for us* today?

Today is certainly about the past, about the story of something that happened to other people – not us – in another place – not here – and in another time – not now. But if that's all this story's about, we might as well recast our faith in passive terms, interested only in events that mean little to any of us right now, except perhaps mild historical interest.

Today is also about the future, about the possibilities that come into existence when people of good will seek to translate one person's vision – Jesus' vision – of God-given human possibility into concrete reality. But the realizing of human possibility in the future will remain an unfulfilled dream in the absence of concrete action in the present.

That means that Pentecost is most importantly about the present, about today. Martin Luther King Jr said it most clearly, I think, fifty years ago in the Riverside Church in New York: "***We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.***" While King was thinking specifically about one historical moment related to a foreign war, his words offer a timeless reminder to us all – the challenge that this day issues to us is not as a once-and-only moment that can be consigned to either to someone else's past reality or another's future hope. The challenge that this day issues to us is all about our here-and-now present moment.

In this "here-and-now" moment the most lively and challenging question is this: ***do we believe that we have been gifted with the presence of God not simply in our lives but indwelling in ourselves?*** Today claims that question as truth: that God has given us all the power we need to transform the world. That's certainly what baptism claims: that the way we engage each other, our world, and God has been transformed by the gift of God's Spirit that now dwells *within* us. If you – if I, if we – accept and embrace that claim as Truth, then the narrowness of our potential arenas of response should be of no great concern to us.

"The fierce urgency of now" proclaims to us what that response looks like: that we have work to do right here responding to global climate change, praying for the liberation of every human being held in the thrall of war, terrorism, and death; working for equality for all persons, closing the gap between the wealthy and the poor, caring for one another with compassion and mercy, and bringing beauty and joy to our daily relationships.

That sounds like a lot! It's easy to feel too small to take on the challenges of this day and age. In that, you can claim solidarity with the first followers of Jesus, who had second thoughts about their ability to carry on Jesus' mission. And remember that our faith not only proclaims, but our ancestors have, by their actions and words, confirmed, that we are not helpless and alone. This day proclaims that across the vast panoply of space, the deep oceans of time, God's Spirit is with us; God has given us power to be agents of healing, of love, of joy, and creative transformation in our time and for all time.

So embrace your calling! By example and by word, spread the Good News, embody Jesus' ministry of hospitality and healing, of compassion and God's grace in your time, in our time, and for all time.