

The Day of Pentecost, May 15, 2016. Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:14-17 John 14:8-27
St. Augustine's in-the-Woods Freeland. Nigel Taber-Hamilton

What begins with confusing, incomprehensible babble suddenly becomes the crystal clear sonorous repetition of Godly words.

What we just did is an acting out of what Luke said metaphorically in the Acts passage, namely that the Tower of Babel – where that word “babble” comes from – is reversed by the resurrection of Jesus and the consequent gift of God's Spirit. The inability for human beings to communicate with each other that was imposed on us because of our vain-glorious and deaf attempts to “be like God” is overturned when we live in God's Spirit and when we choose to have ears to hear and eyes to see that God not only moves among us but within us.

When we do this, when we look and listen out of humility and openness rather than a closed and impenetrable arrogance we'll suddenly discover that those who we thought had nothing to say – or should have nothing to say – those we consider beneath us, culturally and societally: the very young and the very old, servants, women – turn out to be the very ones to offer us words that reveal God's wisdom and intent, the words that offer us life.

Earlier, chronologically speaking, St. Paul has said exactly the same thing, as he does over and over again in his authentic letters: If we recognize our relatedness through God's Spirit *and act on that relatedness through God's Spirit*, then we have all been adopted into God's family – no longer Jew nor Greek, Slave or Free, Male and Female.

Pentecost is the great leveler, if we understand that in Pentecost we all stand before the face of God as human beings undifferentiated from each other, all of equal value, equal worth, differing only in the roles we're called on to fulfil for the advancement of the Kingdom.

“That's all very well,” you might say; “fine words! But this is the Episcopal Church! We have professional, extensively trained leaders; our canons offer a hierarchical model.” To paraphrase Orwell, “All Christians are equal, but some Christians are just *more* equal than others!”

And you might go on, and say, exactly with Orwell, that its not just a Christian malaise; this is humanity's burden: to be human is move toward hierarchy.

And yet. And yet we as people of faith are challenged not to live this way. And, in fact, the whole of humanity has spent its entire time on this planet struggling between the utopian vision of equality and the pragmatic reality of hierarchy. The former so often ends up being mired a communitarianism that lacks direction and leadership, which is why we move to the latter; but then the latter so often ends up hi-jacked by a totalitarianism that lacks compassion an respect.

Even though we as Christians are called not to get caught in this trap, Christian faith has been even more prone to the pendulum's swing than our culture in general! We spent the first three-hundred years of our faith-history trying to work out what Jesus meant for us, trying to live into the fullness of Christ and Christ's resurrection, but then the next seventeen hundred under the

thrall of a Greek Philosophy that demanded unthinking adherence and placed the levers of power in the hands of the few, rather than – with Jesus – rejecting the idea of levers of power altogether. Christian faith is going through a phase where we are being challenged by our origin documents – the Old and New Testaments – and especially by the gospels’ and Pauline visions of community – to embrace a more egalitarian vision of human existence and ordering.

At the same time as we’re faced with this challenge our North American society is going through a phase where the sharp divide between a more egalitarian and communitarian vision on the one side, and a more hierarchical, rule-bound vision on the other has never been clearer. In our own nation, the more hierarchical, rule-bound vision is beginning to collapse, as its proponents age. The future belongs to the young, and the young want that more egalitarian and communitarian vision

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There’s a real irony, therefore, that what our faith offers is what our world wants but we are more often acting as road-blocks than bridges! The challenge for us – here as everywhere else – is to have the courage to step out of the way and allow our faith’s gifts to meet our world’s needs.

This day – Pentecost – calls us to that action. God calls us to that action. Jesus calls us to that action. The Spirit calls us to that action.

As we move forward in the fall we will, in the fall, begin to examine ways in which we can structure our community so that we reflect the egalitarian, communitarian values of our faith. To be successful, it will require your participation.

It will require of us – as I said earlier – to look and listen out of humility and openness rather than out of a closed and impenetrable arrogance. It will require of us a willingness to explore what our faith calls us to do *and* what we are willing to do to participate. And it will be fun!

As we go forward, may we, too, live into that moment at 9 o’clock in the morning, and, with the apostles, be transformed!