

What is the meaning of this Day of Pentecost? What is the good news of Pentecost? We have only to look at the world around us.

War rages on in Ukraine, in Russia, in Central Africa and the Middle East. Economic conflict festers between the US and China. Tension mounts in congress as the government approaches the deadline for paying its bills. Anniversaries of school shootings, executions in the streets by police, and the arguments about who's to blame and how we are to stem the tide - they grow in volume even as we start tuning it all out. Threat of recession, growing inflation, and a pandemic that has slowed but promises to persist for years to come.

Watching all this unfold is hard, but registering the impact of all this on our lives (on the way we've come to react and constrict and brace and recoil) is harder still. An air of desperation seems to have taken hold in our common life: distrust, corruption, and "getting what you can while there's something left to get" has embedded itself in our psyche as a nation, as a state and even in our own small towns. The "common good" is as uncommon as it's ever been, compounding our sense that things are bad and that our sadness at the ineffectual conversations raging about how to fix it all is here to stay.

But today we hear again of the promise and the gift. We heard it some weeks ago at the other end of Eastertide. The disciples were all in one place then as well - in a shuttered and locked room. They had barred the door but it was fear that caged them. Then Jesus, risen from death, appeared among them and said, "Peace be with you." You have nothing to fear. Quiet your worries, your need to be right, your need to have won. Peace be with you.

Then he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." That promised Spirit arrived today in our reading from Acts, but what Jesus tells them about the Holy Spirit is this: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." So whatever this Holy Spirit was expected to be or do, it has something to do with forgiveness, something to do with the distances between - something to do with healing.

Gathered together 50 days later, a violent wind, tongues of fire and (filled with the Holy Spirit) SPEECH, "as the Spirit gave them ability." In one way the coming of this Spirit feels like the last thing we need, only adding to the chaos of Jerusalem (and Red Lodge) on a holiday weekend. But then, the miraculous.

Having heard the noise, the crowd gathered around these disciples began to hear familiar words, to recognize their mother tongues, to hear and understand what the disciples were saying. Bewildered, amazed, perplexed and astonished, they ask "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language... in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power?"

Mighty winds, tongues of fire and (filled with the Holy Spirit) unfamiliar speech - all this is impressive. But the real miracle here is that what they said was heard, was received and understood. You may need to preach a sermon or two before you really understand how incredible this is but... Just imagine!

It may have been said in jest (this accusation of their being drunk). But even in jest, this sounds like a way of deflecting the impact of what was happening, of what they were hearing. We do that too, don't we? In the many and various

ways we hold “what wants to move us” at an arm’s length, we hold that distance too. And that distance is a short step toward the cynicism that feeds the divisions we are suffering from.

Well the Spirit won’t be kept away - it comes, pushing our arm aside as it did those disciples and those who gathered to listen. And just to make sure the bystanders got what was happening, the Spirit moves Peter to address them: “Let this be known to you, and listen to what I say... this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:”

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your children shall prophecy, and your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams. Even upon my servants, on all people, I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophecy.

Does that not sound like good news to you yet?

The Spirit of God was poured out on the disciples that day and what happened is that it began bridging the divides - the divides between people in language and culture, divides between what is and what ought to be, even divides in ourselves. Remember that these disciples were not model followers of Jesus - they fought over who would sit where when Jesus came into his kingdom, and scattered like sheep/abandoning him when it counted. The forgiveness of Jesus himself (which we have, which those disciples have) is not always enough for us to forgive ourselves for what we've done. So Jesus gave and gives us the Holy Spirit, to remind us, to move in us and in each other, to keep that gift of forgiveness before our eyes, and to help us offer it to each other.

And across all the differences represented in Jerusalem that day, people began connecting, began to hear each other. And stirred into relationship, (we read a little further on that) thousands were immediately baptized and joined this community of followers. And suddenly the commons come back into view.

The Commons is a term that comes from property law, but it refers to what is held “in” common - not what’s the same between us, but what we share and care for together. It originally referred to lands that were owned by a lord and shared with farmers for pasture. But today, you might think of it as the US postal system, the library, emergency responders, public parks, hiking trails, bike paths, the city pool, camping and recreation infrastructure, etc.

In that way, you might start thinking of it as including the air we breathe, the creek, the water we drink, the land under our feet.

The Commons also includes public conversations, the discourse of people with a platform, and the tone of what they put into public discourse. Of late, division is what they pump into the conversations of this society. But the Spirit opens us to what we share in common - it creates connection between us and introduces us back to what we share (Far more than what divides us). And the Spirit will not be kept out, no matter the division we sow.

We read that (in that community) created in the Spirit's coming, they shared all things in common, selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds "as any had need." That's really something in itself, but I think this is also what Paul is talking about in our reading from 1st Corinthians. He's saying that different people have different gifts, but that every gift is activated by the Spirit for the sake of others. He says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

What he's describing for those Corinthians is the way they can be as different as they are, but still **one** in the Spirit. Our reading ends with the first verses of Paul's talking about the one body of Christ. The body of Christ is the real work the Holy Spirit came to do - forging community across every line that we draw to divide ourselves one from the other. And like so much of what this Church is meant to be, that community is not only for us.

The Church's public influence has steadily waned over the past 70 years or so. But the Church persists because the Spirit comes, again and again, where two or three are gathered, and creates a "space apart" for all people looking for a different way forward. Even in the midst of war, of economic uncertainty, of fear, of destruction and death, the Spirit "holds space" when people gather in Jesus' name - space for hope. That hope is the witness of Easter, our witness to the one crucified and risen. And it is that hope that by the Spirit stands firm in the face of all that the world tells us is truer.

May our witness shatter the sword, break the spear and burn the shield with fire. May our witness, led by the Spirit, make us one to outshine the darkness.

AMEN