

June 5, 2022

Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21; Philippians 4:4-7

“Beyond Understanding”

1. Growing up in Mexico, many of our TV programs came from American TV networks, back when there were only three or four channels
  - a. Of course I watched my favorite cartoons, all dubbed into Spanish (the Flintstones, the Jetsons, Bugs Bunny)
  - b. Later I liked TV watching shows like Mission Impossible, Kojak or Colombo. Again, all dubbed to Spanish.
  - c. Going to the movies was different, though: that meant seeing Hollywood films not dubbed but subtitled
  - d. That does take some little more getting used to, but it's fine. You'd be surprised how much you can pick up from another language just by listening to the language on TV
  - e. Some of our new Afghan neighbors can attest to that. One of them said he basically taught himself English by watching American TV shows, and another one learned Hindi watching Indian TV.
  - f. So, that was back in the day. Now? I can go on a streaming service and watch a foreign movie and can choose to listen to it dubbed in about 5-10 languages or have the option of hearing it in the original language but with a choice of about 5-10 subtitled languages.
2. Think of the Day of Pentecost, which we celebrate today, as a first century version of one of these dubbed movies, simultaneously dubbed into dozens of languages
  - a. Pentecost is a Jewish festival
    - i. I know we think of it as a Christian date because of the story we read today in Acts, but it was a celebration which brought many to Jerusalem
    - ii. It took place fifty days after the Passover (the word Pentecost comes from the Greek “Fifty”)
    - iii. A resource tells us that “The Jewish feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) was primarily a thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, but it was later associated with a remembrance of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.”  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecost-Christianity>
    - iv. So think of it then as first an agricultural thanksgiving which then became a celebration of God's covenant and fruitfulness in the people through the giving (and keeping) of the law
  - b. The scene is set, then, with many Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem from all over to celebrate the festival
    - i. There is the wind and fire, the signs of the Spirit coming to each of the followers of Jesus in the house where they were staying
    - ii. And they blurt out, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to speak about God's powerful work among humans
    - iii. And Peter stands and offers a sermon which connects the prophesy of Joel to the present moment: God will speak through ALL God's children
  - c. God is being heard and seen through the fullness of God's people
    - i. There is the symbolic representation of diverse languages

- ii. There is the promise of the prophet that the word of God will flow no matter what perceived barriers there be, of gender or social status or age
- 3. We have an important challenge hidden in the midst of this celebration of the Spirit: we realize we'll have to work harder to hear some of the voices God is speaking through.
  - a. We celebrate the voices we hear. We amplify the voices struggling to be heard.
    - i. I keep reminding us that in so many ways the Church is more at home in the margins than at the center, or at least that's true as the Church came into being
    - ii. Jesus was always interacting with people whose voices were either not heard or were plainly rejected. Yet by being with them, Jesus centered them, brought them to the center of activity
    - iii. Jesus could have gotten complacent and stayed only in the crowds that had money or power, or where there was a sense of comfort from a uniformity of ideas
    - iv. But he kept listening to other voices, and pushing his followers to be present and listen to those voices not being heard. To turn up the volume to their soundtrack
  - b. We could take for granted that all voices get heard, but the fact remains we still need to listen
    - i. And we need to do more than listen. It is about the justice of turning up the volume as folks on the margins speak with as much Spirit as anyone else
    - ii. Think of the amazing gifts of the three young people we celebrated this morning
    - iii. They bring a wisdom which comes from God's Spirit. They bring questions which ought to help us reframe conversations about faith. They bring insights & ideas
- 4. Being a follower of Jesus is about following Jesus and his example. That much is clear. But Pentecost reminds us of our ongoing journeys to discover the fullness of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through all of God's people, especially focusing on the voices we may not first hear. Pay attention. Listen. We'll be glad we did

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/pentecost-rejoice-in-the-lord-2/commentary-on-acts-21-21-philippians-44-7-3>

#### Reflection Questions:

1. Share a story of one time when you felt seen/heard – when someone really “got you” or acknowledged you in a way that made you feel fully a part of community.
2. The listing of places of origin in today's passage (Acts 2:5-11) is a yearly tongue twister for liturgists. Why do you think it was important for the writer to include all those locations? What would you include in a modern list and why?
3. What would it look like for our church to hear God's Spirit speaking through “all flesh... your sons and your daughters... your young men... your old men... slaves, both men and women...”? (Acts 2:17-18)