

Scripture Readings and Sermon

June 9, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Acts 2:1-21 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The word "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word "pentekostes" which means fifty. Pentecost is the Jewish celebration mentioned in Leviticus 23:16, "You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the LORD". Called *Shavu'ot* ("Weeks") in Hebrew, the festival is one of three pilgrimage festivals to Jerusalem. The festival is also called "Day of Firstfruits" (Numbers 28:26) and "Feast of the Harvest" (Exodus 23:16) since the first fruits (winter wheat) is offered to God to bless the summer wheat harvest. A connection has been made between the disciples ("students") receiving the Holy Spirit and becoming the first apostles ("sent ones") with the "first fruits" of Jesus' ministry. It is during this same time of year that some scholars believe that Moses came down the mountain with the Torah (Law) based on Exodus 19:1. Symbolically, just as Moses ascended the mountain and came down with the law so to did Jesus ascend and the Spirit came down. This law, however, was not written on stone but on the heart. The importance of this festival as a pilgrimage also gives a back drop to the various languages and dialects described in Acts 2:9-11. Just as human arrogance caused people to be divided at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:7-9), so now humility and faith in Jesus brings humanity together in Christ.

Commentary on Romans 8:14-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul's argument in Romans between the flesh and Spirit is grounded in what motivates us. For Paul, the purpose of the Law was to convict us of our sin by revealing God's perfect intention. The Law demands that we face our destructive behaviors and abuses. Legalism, however, forces us to dwell on our self destructiveness without any hope of relief. The Spirit, however, reveals a better way based not on self deprecation but on love. Like a parent leading a child, the Spirit reveals the destructive nature of our habits and leads us into positive habits and relationships. This is why Paul uses the term Abba for God rather than the LORD God Almighty which emphasizes a more kingly and legalistic role rather than the relational role offered through the Holy Spirit. The term Abba which means "Daddy" is an intimate reference by a child towards their father and is rarely used in religious Jewish writings because of presumption of familiarity. For Paul, however, this familiarity is possible because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Under the Law, we are obedient slaves but under the Spirit we are children responding out of love rather than fear. It is faith in Jesus that opens our hearts to the Father and the Father who gives the Spirit and the Spirit that makes grace possible.

Commentary on John 14:8-17 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This is the third question asked after Jesus gave them a "new commandment" in 13:34-35 [Peter (13:37), Thomas (14:5), Philip (14:8), and Judas {not Iscariot} (14:22)]. Philip is not sure he will know the Father. At this point Jesus tries to explain the "incarnation". Jesus is not just a person but is the incarnation of God on earth. Since the will of God can not be divided, knowing Jesus is knowing God and knowing God is knowing the Father. If you have seen Jesus then you have seen the Father. This one will would be tested in Gethsemane at which time Jesus could have severed his relationship with God thereby rupturing the incarnation. Because the unity of the will was never diminished, the works of Jesus were the works of the Father. Since the will of God is love, than the Father loves the world, Jesus loves the disciples, and the Spirit instills that love in the believer. By the same token, the works of the Spirit and the nature of the Spirit is Jesus. If Jesus is the Truth than the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. If Jesus is the only mediator and advocate than the Spirit is the Advocate.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

Some twenty years ago, my mother bought a CD set of C. S. Lewis talks recorded by the BBC. She gave me the set as a gift and I could not wait to listen but, when I did, it was like listening to a foreign language. The words were in English but the concepts were so new that it took me several concentrated hearings to understand the concepts that C. S. Lewis was trying to convey. The miracle at Pentecost was not simply that the apostles were able to speak in various languages but that Peter was able to clearly explain using Joel what was actually happening. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not simply the ability to communicate through the gifts of tongues and prophecy but more importantly the ability to perceive and understand what is being communicated.

The practice of spiritual disciplines is not to fill up with grace like a convenience store soda fountain but to open our minds and our souls receive and perceive when God is pouring the Holy Spirit into our lives. Tom Berlin tells a story about how he was moved to make a phone call to synagogue after he heard of violence to Jews on the news. Because he was receptive to the movement of the Holy Spirit, new relationships were formed in ways he never could have expected. This is what Paul means in Romans when he says that through the Holy Spirit we become children of God. Human barriers of race and language, customs and prejudices, fall away like straw before the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is the will of God manifested in our lives through Jesus Christ, we begin to be aware of the movement of God in all of creation. Things that once seemed disconnected and random suddenly become a brilliant tapestry of God's design. Like Peter, we begin to understand God's work of love and grace. We begin to perceive more of what unites us as God's children than what divides us as nations and races. We begin to discern God's will in our lives and in the life of our community and we feel convicted to follow the Father's will. The words of Jesus become alive in our lives and the Holy Spirit takes us to places we never dreamed possible. Let us join with the apostles who waited for that day of Pentecost and say "Come, Holy Spirit".