

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 23, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## **Commentary on John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

For John, Jesus is the very Word of God. In the Old Testament, those who were charged with delivering the Word of God were known as prophets. In order for a prophet to speak the Word, they need the Spirit of God to come over them or enter into them often by "consuming the word". Jesus, in his last speech, declares that the disciples will be facing the same hostility that the prophets did before the Babylonian captivity. They will be rejected and scorned but the Spirit of Truth, as in the time of the prophets, will come upon them so that they might witness. The words the Spirit gives will both encourage the believers and condemn the world. Jesus says the Spirit will convict the world: 1) of sin; 2) of righteousness; and 3) judgment. Note that this was originally the role of the Law to convict the Jews of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Sin, however, is no longer based on obedience to the Law but belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Righteousness is no longer based on one's relationship with the Temple but on a person's relationship with the Father through Jesus. And judgment is no longer reserved for those who are not Jewish but applies to everyone who follows the world rather than Jesus. With the gift of the Advocate, they will no longer be disciples or students but will become apostles or those sent to proclaim the Word. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, now the apostles will be sent by Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the conduit through which the church continues the ministry of Jesus Christ.

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

What or who sets your agenda for the day?

Are you guided by the Spirit or a "to-do" list set by family and work?

What if the Spirit could make your "to-do" list easier and more productive?

Do you trust that God has a better plan than you do?

How would your day change if you invite the Spirit to set your agenda?

## **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 too 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.

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Have you been in a place where people were speaking a foreign language?

Did you feel like no one seemed to understand you? Was there an interpreter?

Have you ever been in worship where people spoke in tongues? What was it like?  
What must it have been like on that first day of Pentecost?  
What was it like when someone first presented the Good News in a way that you could hear?

**Commentary on Romans 8:22-27** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

For Paul, the flesh does not represent the created nature which God declared good but rather the self centered survival instincts that seek immediate gratification of the individual over the longer term needs of the community. With God as Father, then all of creation is the Father's house. Just as our sinful focus on self gratification distorts our relationship with God and one another, it also distorts our relationship with creation. All of creation suffers and "groans" in pain awaiting the salvation of humanity and the restoration of compassion for both humanity and creation. This suffering began to be relieved when the "first fruits of the Spirit" was given at Pentecost. This gift not only brought understanding but with understanding brought hope through faith in the promises of God revealed in Christ. As children of God through the Spirit, all of creation is being restored to its original goodness. That restoration begins in the heart of the believer with the intercession of the Spirit.

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

Has an event ever "knocked the wind" out of you when you had no words?  
Is it comforting to know that even then the Spirit was speaking on your behalf?  
Is praying a comfort or a chore?  
If it is a chore, is it because you've been taught that there are special ways and formulas?  
What if prayer was simply sitting down with a friend to talk about what's going on?  
Is the Spirit your friend and companion in life?

**Sermon "A Gift Promised and Received"** ([Sermon Video](#))

Accepting and experiencing can be two separate things in the life of faith. Many people say that they accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior but do not experience the blessed assurance of that salvation. This is because Pentecost and the Crucifixion/Resurrection are two different events both in scripture and in the life of a believer. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was an Anglican minister and missionary long before he experienced a warming of the heart. Even Peter proclaimed Jesus was the Messiah before he truly knew what that meant.

Accepting Jesus is having faith in the witness and stories passed down by individuals and the church. Often we accept Jesus based on the faith of our parents and grandparents. Their examples of Christian living and morality inspires us to follow the same Savior. We make a conscious choice to accept that which has been taught. Those teachings can become real in our lives at completely different times. Knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit are two different experiences. No longer are we modeling our lives off of the stories of Jesus but rather we are being guided by Holy Spirit to walk along side Jesus. This is why Jesus tells the disciples that he must go. It is only after Jesus ascended that the spirit of Jesus could become a living presence in the heart of the believers. So to, only when we release our narrow definition of Jesus can we be open to the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit not only guides us along the path with Jesus but equips us to walk that path. Faced with people from various countries who were speaking various languages, the Holy Spirit equipped the disciples with the ability to proclaim the Good News in a way everyone could hear. Even when we speak the same language, the way we use and understand that language can cause miscommunication but the Holy Spirit gave them not only the gift of language but communication. It is not the gifts of tongues that is important as it is that the Holy Spirit equips the disciples with what they need to do God's will. The Holy Spirit not only guides us but equips us to go where the Lord send

us.

The task God gives us can often be long and tiring. The world often tempts us with distractions or places obstacles in our way. While the Holy Spirit equips us for the task, that does not always spare us from the trials and tribulations brought on by the world. Even family can sometimes question why we keep going rather than just giving up (take Job's wife). It is during those times when we need to know that we are not alone but the Holy Spirit is with us and praying for us. When we are so exhausted that we have neither the wits to know what to say or even the strength to speak, the Holy Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. The Holy Spirit guides, equips, and sustains us down the road that Jesus has prepared. While we may have accepted Jesus, it is when we experience the Holy Spirit that we are ready to walk the spiritual path of discipleship.