

**BGCW5/23/10 Pentecost Worship Theme: Come Holy Spirit, Come,** John 14: 1-17, 25-27, Acts 2: 1-21

As we heard in the New Testament Lesson, this is the Sunday in the church calendar year when we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming upon the first disciples of Jesus Christ. According to the lesson from Acts, the coming of the Holy Spirit was a hoped for event that came in a most surprising way—divided tongues of fire on the heads of the disciples who spoke like Old Testament prophets the message of God in languages they had never been taught.

Who were the people to whom the message from the Holy Spirit was addressed? Along with the local Jewish community, as we heard in the reading from Acts, there were Jews from all over the Middle East. Around 30 AD, they had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate a day-long harvest festival more commonly known as the “Feast of Weeks” that occurred 50 days after the Passover. Thus, we have the name, “Pentecost,” which means fiftieth day.

When the disciples were asked what this speaking in other languages meant and were also accused by some of being drunk, Peter quoted a rousing piece of scripture from Joel. The passage began: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh..” and ended with “then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What was heard by the Jews in 350 B.C., and on the first Christian Pentecost in 30 AD, and needs to be heard today is how inclusive God’s message and Holy Spirit are. I will repeat it: “I will pour out my Spirit upon **all flesh...** Then **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Joel 2: 28, 32).

The inclusiveness of this message for the early disciples and for us today

really began with what Jesus had to say in today's passage from John 14. In the beginning verses, Jesus was preparing those same disciples for his death, resurrection, and ascension and their mission to the world. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places." Jesus was emphasizing that if you have faith in God, you also have faith in him and... because he and the Father are one, you too can have the same relationship to them as they have to each other. You see, the phrase, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" goes beyond any idea of a physical place for us in heaven. It is really referring to the inclusive character of God, Jesus and their joined hearts. Jesus was saying, "My return to God will make it possible for you to join in the relationship that the Father and I share." There will be no limit as to who can be part of the saving relationship to God in Jesus Christ. "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" refers to common heart of God and Jesus which has unlimited space for you and me. It was Jesus way of reiterating Joel's message, "Then **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." TNIBC Vol. IX pg. 741

Jesus could proclaim this inclusive message because as he told the disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him....Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." The Bible Professor, Gail R. O' Day writes: "This is the heart of the good news... that in Jesus, the incarnate Word, the Son of God, one can see and know God in a manner never before possible. These words express John's unshakable belief that the coming of Jesus, the Word made flesh, decisively altered the relationship between God and humanity.

These words affirm that Jesus is the tangible presence of God in the world and that God the Father can be known only through that incarnate presence. Humanity's encounter with Jesus the Son makes possible a new experience of God as the Father." This is why Jesus could proclaim this inclusive message, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also.

Sadly, "the very clarity and decisiveness of John's conviction expressed" in John 14:6 has been used as a weapon which some Christians use "to bludgeon their opponents into theological submission." Regrettably, "these words are used as a litmus test for Christian faith in myriad conversations and debates within the contemporary church." Unfortunately, "they are taken by some as the rallying cry of Christian triumphalism, proof positive that Christians have the corner on God and that people of any and all other faiths are condemned." They "are also seen by others as embarrassingly exclusionary and narrow-minded, and they are pointed to as evidence of the problems inherent in asserting Christian faith claims in a pluralistic world."

Jesus' words are not meant to be exclusionary or used in a negative way at all. Again, they were and are meant to be inclusionary. "Jesus' claim that 'no one comes to the Father except through me' is the joyous affirmation of a religious community that does, indeed, believe that God is available to them" and the whole world "decisively in the incarnation," in God in the flesh, "in God seen and understood as never before."

"When one brackets out the questions that contemporary Christians falsely import into these verses, there is nothing outrageous or offensive about the claims made here. Rather, at the heart of Christianity is this

affirmation of the decisive revelation of God in the incarnation.” It is a revelation we can joyfully proclaim to the world. “John 14:6 can thus be read as the core claim of Christian identity; what distinguishes Christians from peoples of other faiths is the conviction given expression in Jesus declaring, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ It is, indeed, through Jesus that Christians have access to their God.” Jesus’ words are not meant to be exclusionary or negative at all. Again, they were and are meant to be inclusionary. [TNIBC Vol. IX pg. 742-43, 45.](#)

Furthermore, “to recognize Jesus as the truth is to affirm that as the Word made flesh, Jesus makes the truth of God available to the world. It is to acknowledge that one’s relationship with Jesus is a relationship with the liberating truth of God, that Jesus’ life and ministry are the ultimate witness to God’s truth. Jesus is the ‘way,’ the promise of the possibility of unity with God, because in him one meets the truth of God.”

“When Jesus identifies himself as ‘the life,’” he is repeating the fact that God’s life giving power has been given to him as seen in the miracles where he healed people and raised them from the dead. “Jesus is life, because Jesus brings God’s gift of life to the world.”

“Jesus is ‘the way,’ because he is the access point to God’s promise of life,” new life now and everlasting life later. Another way to see Jesus as the way is to picture a chasm between God and humanity caused by our sin. When Jesus laid down his life for us, he became the bridge, the gateway and life giving path across the chasm directly to God with whom he is one. It is a way open to all who will take it. [TNIBC Vol. IX pg. 742-43, 45.](#)

To assure the truth of this message and to sustain his disciples as they shared it, Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit to help them

through the good and bad times. In the Greek, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the ***Parakletos or Paraclete*** which has no exact translation into English. The New Revised Version of the Bible translates **Parakletos** as the Advocate. As a verb Paraclete can mean “to exhort and encourage,” “to comfort and console,” “to call upon for help,” and “to appeal.” The noun form can mean “the one who exhorts,” “the one who comforts,” “the one who helps,” and “the one who makes appeals on one’s behalf.” Not only does this describe the work of the Holy Spirit, but also of Jesus and God. So as Jesus and God are one, so is the Holy Spirit one with them as they work together on our behalf—to exhort, comfort, help and appeal on our behalf.

TNIBC Vol. IX, pg 747.

And so it was that God fulfilled the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to be the Paraclete to the early church on Pentecost. God continues to send the Holy Spirit to work in the same way with us today. It is by the Holy Spirit’s inclusive power that people of all ages, sexual orientation, races, nationalities, political parties or whatever we might use to differentiate people are given the gift of faith in God in Jesus Christ; are called to be one in the Spirit; and are given gifts to do the “greater works of love” that Jesus told us we would do.

Today, as living proof that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one, that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and the inclusive way to God the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is still acting as our Paraclete, we have welcomed nine new members and baptized three of their children. The fact that these wonderful people want to join this congregation is a reflection of the grace of God working through Jesus in the Holy Spirit to move these fellow Christians into this fellowship. It is a reflection of how the Holy Spirit

working as the Paraclete has overcome any fears they may have had in joining with us. It is also a reflection of how the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete has moved us to be an inclusive and welcoming congregation. It will be the work of the Holy Spirit to help the parents of Noah, Maya and Brennan, and the rest of us to raise them to know and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. As Jesus said, "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Come Holy Spirit, Come.

The Gospel lesson is from John 14: 1-17, 25-27. Jesus reassures his disciples that they will not be abandoned by him in any manner after he leaves them.

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way to the place where I am going.” 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” 8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

12 Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. 15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

25 “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. The Word of the Lord

The New Testament Lesson is from Acts 2: 1-21. This is the Pentecost story where God sends the Holy Spirit to the disciples.

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' The Word of the Lord

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

May 20, 2010

Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Come Holy Spirit, Come

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