

Pentecost C 2022 John 14 8-17 25-27 & Acts 2 1-21

Today is Pentecost; we have a baptism today; this afternoon I'll be heading to Newry to officially install their parish's pastor; many of us pastors are celebrating our first call and ordination anniversaries because it's also synod assembly this week; if you're on the school schedule, this is your first real weekend off in nine months; if you're on the baseball schedule, it's championship season. So much going on, yet it probably doesn't feel like as much of a major holiday or important time as other holidays and season of the year—Christmas or Easter. That's partly because Pentecost and the long season that comes after it call us to a very different response than adoring the infant Jesus or celebrating the risen Christ.

John's gospel and the Acts reading for today situate us on either side of major events in Jesus' timeline: the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. John records Jesus, just before he is arrested, promising the disciples peace, hope, and help: his promise is not focused just on returning to them after his resurrection, although he does speak and eat with them after he is risen. But his main message here is that after he has ascended to the Father, he will send them the Spirit. Liturgically, we usually glide by the Ascension because it always falls on a Thursday; but on that day the disciples watched Jesus ascend to heaven and then had to be told to stop standing around looking up after him as if he was going to float right back down. Jesus promised his presence in a new way that, ironically, could only be achieved by his absence. If he had continued living with them physically, in his fully human body, he would have been limited by time and location. When Jesus returns to the Father and sends the Spirit, God is then with all of us, everywhere, at all times, in a new and unbounded way.

Jesus' promise in John's gospel sort of sounds like the Spirit is coming to make the disciples feel better when Jesus is gone. He speaks about the Spirit as the Advocate or Comforter or Helper, and certainly some Christian theology tends toward a more personal, though never private, kind of spirituality where Jesus' presence is experienced as solace, support, and consolation—that idea of What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sin and grief to bear. But Jesus also promises his followers that the Spirit will empower them to do the works that he does, and in fact greater works than these. So he gives them peace and un-troubled hearts, yes, but he also promises that they will be able to do whatever will glorify God.

It was Luke, not John, who wrote the book of Acts. So today's readings show us two very different authors' very different perspectives of the Spirit and what the Spirit does. John's gospel focuses on the Spirit's gift of peace for Jesus' closest disciples; but Acts shows the Spirit

literally lighting a fire and blowing the doors off the place. We read that devoted Jewish believers from every nation had traveled to the Temple in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. While those pilgrims were in town, the Spirit came to the apostles who, 50 days after the Passover and Jesus' Passion, were still gathered together all in one place. The Spirit allows them to share their story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension such that each of the international pilgrims hears them speaking in their own language. This is how those devout Jews can spread the gospel throughout the known world, taking those stories back to their homes. The promise Jesus made to his little group of disciples that we read about in John's gospel explodes to reach all people in the Pentecost story in Acts.

It's worth going back to John's gospel for a moment to hear Jesus say that the peace he gives to his disciples is not the peace that the world gives. It would be hard for the earliest Christians to hear Jesus make that distinction without thinking of the Pax Romana, the Roman Empire's propaganda of "peace" that wasn't the *shalom* of God that passes understanding but only an absence of hostility, enforced through military occupation and cultural assimilation. Rome said, "Everyone out there needs to act like us, and then we'll let you be part of the empire." The Pentecost event was the exact opposite: "Take this good news out and see how it it enlivens all the unique communities of the world."

Over the years, the church forgot its Pentecost roots and developed the bad habit of expecting, even requiring assimilation, thinking everyone who is out there somewhere should come to us, adopt our traditions, and think, speak, and act like us. We behave as though the Spirit came to those first disciples and they experienced peace by keeping the Spirit locked in that room. But that's not how the story goes. The Spirit moves in the opposite direction, sending us out—not so we can make other people conform to us but teaching us to communicate with other people whose experiences are different than our own, enabling us to show them how God's love and grace have transformed our lives, and showing us how God's love and grace are alive in them. More so than Christmas or Easter, when we mostly celebrate what God has done for us, Pentecost calls us to get up and go out, to participate in what God is still doing with, through, and for other people. When we give thanks for and affirm our baptism, we welcome, we hope, we pray for the Spirit to light that fire in us. Jesus, who promised to send the Spirit, and who keeps his promises, answers that prayer, both comforting and challenging us through the Spirit. Relying on that promise, let's see where God is sending us, and because we know we have God's help, let us eagerly go.