



Pentecost Sunday Message

“Not New Wine...a New Way”

Scripture References: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4-15

Greetings Saints and welcome again to All Saints, Vancouver on this beautiful Pentecost Sunday. On behalf of Mona and myself and our Worship Team, it is such a blessing to welcome you all back to the sanctuary for in-person worship and into our Virtual Community of Faith once again on Facebook Live. Thank you for choosing to spend some time with us in worship today, no matter where or how you have chosen to do so. We are blessed by your presence and are strengthened by the diversity that you bring to this Community.

As I am seeing red everywhere, I don't think that I need to remind you about what's going on today -- but I will anyway -- red, the color of Pentecost. Red the color of the Holy Spirit. Red, the color of fire, and fire symbolizing the agent of change. This morning is all about change and fire is the perfect symbol. And so, Saints, lets get started then on this morning's Pentecost Message, “Not New Wine, New Words.”

I hope you enjoyed both the hearing our Sacred Stories this morning and how they were told. Did you notice that our Storytellers were seated today like storytellers often were. This is meant to help us remember that for the 35 or 40 years before the first of the scriptures were ever written down in the first century, the stories were passed orally from one person to another, from one family to another, one community to another. People speaking and listening and passing on the “Good News” of the life and work of Jesus. So, we thought that it might be nice to remember and honor our earliest Christian beginnings as an oral tradition community by modeling it for you today. In today's stories there is a lot to listen to and learn from. The Prophet Ezekiel and his story of renewal and rebirth, The Dry Bones. And the classic Pentecost story from Acts, where the Apostles start

speaking in new and different languages and the listeners thinking they are drunk on “new wine.”

You know Saints, one of the tools that I like to use when I am trying to dig deep into a story, to unwrap what the story is “really” about; hidden meanings, symbols, and the like, I always like to ask three questions. “Why them?” ...why a particular character is speaking or doing something significant. “Why this?” ...what is it about the action or words that might provide some additional insight about what the writer/storyteller is trying to say. And finally, “Why now?” ...what is it about the particular timing of the actions that can help us understand things more completely. So, let’s give it a try and apply it to the Acts story of Pentecost: Why Them; Why This; Why Now? Here we go.

To answer the “Why them?” question there are really two different “thems” aren’t there? The speakers...the Disciples and the listeners those who have come into Jerusalem from all around the Mediterranean area.

Let’s take Jesus’ Disciples. There are no stranger, and unlikely characters to be preaching the “Good News of Jesus” on this particular day than the Disciples. Jesus disciples were all rural peasants, from the Palestinian backwater of Galilee. Uneducated fishermen, shepherds and farmers who could neither read nor write. But they weren’t alone in their illiteracy. In the first century, scholars estimate that less than 10% of the population of the Mediterranean area could read or write. Most people could not even sign their names. The native language of both Jesus and the Disciples was not the Greek of Mediterranean culture and commerce; nor the Latin of the Roman Empire; nor the Coptic of the Egyptian scholars or the Arabic of the Eastern Sultans or even Hebrew the language of the Jewish religious priests and elders. The disciple’s language was Aramaic, a simple Semitic language in the local Palestinian dialect that came to Galilee in the 11th century BC from what is now Syria. The disciples were not learned scholars, deep theoretical thinkers, or even multi-lingual or well-traveled merchants. They were society’s bottom tier that never left the hundred-mile radius from Nazareth to Jerusalem. The Disciples were the most unlikely of characters to speak anything of theological importance, let alone in 16 different languages at the same time! Why them? Because the disciples could never do this on their own, never! They could barely speak their own language. And we hear in Acts: “and the crowd said, ‘in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power’.” Not only did the visitors hear them speak of God’s deeds of power, but they indeed saw God’s

deeds of power on that day. *Why them? Because with the intercession of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible.*

So, let's have a look at the "other them" ...the listeners.

WHO WERE ALL THESE PEOPLE WHO GATHERED IN JERUSALEM ON THAT DAY? They were devout Jews from "every nation under heaven" who were visiting Jerusalem to commemorate Shavuot and thank the Lord for giving them the Torah and the Ten Commandments.

Acts 2:9-11 - "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

Parthians, Medes, Elamites: They were Jews living in what is present day Iran.

Mesopotamia: They were Jews living in what is modern day Iraq, Kuwait, and Western Syria around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. At the time of the Book of Acts, Mesopotamia was a Roman province.

Judea: They were Jews living in the area around Jerusalem, which is present day Israel and Palestine. Judea was also a Roman Province at the time of the Book of Acts. **Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia:** They were Jews living in what is modern day Turkey. **Egypt:** They were Jewish men living in what is also known today as Egypt. **Cyrene:** They were faithful Jewish men living around the city of Cyrene in Libya. **Rome:** These were Jews who had converted, living in Rome, at that time capital of the Roman Empire and today capital of Italy. **Cretans:** They were Jews living on the island of Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea near Libya. **Arabs:** They were Jews living in the Arabian Peninsula, present day Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Why Them? Why the listeners...the point that the author of Acts is trying to make, and the point of my middle eastern geography lesson is that on that day "everybody was there." All peoples of the then known world. East to West. North to South. It was a culturally diverse, eclectic and universal group of Jews from everywhere where there were Jews. *Why Them? Because the Spirit is telling us that the Jesus Way is universally relevant, universally applicable, it is a gift for all, from wherever you may have come from, The Jesus Way can be home.*

So now we go to our next our question, Why Now? This question is critical in a deeper understanding of the Pentecost Miracle. Why did the miracle happen when it did? What was the Spirit saying to Gods People? We learned that everyone was in Jerusalem from all over the known world. But why? They were **people** who had **gathered in Jerusalem** to celebrate Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks that around late May or early June. On Shavuot all Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem to commemorate that feast. The Hebrew word Shavuot means "weeks" or "sevens" and speaks to the fact that this festival happens seven weeks after Passover. Passover is the day that God freed the Israelites from slavery and oppression and brought them out of the land of Egypt.

The Feast of Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day when God gave the Torah to the Hebrews at Mount Sinai. Pentecost is the Greek name for Shavuot and literally means "fiftieth day," because it's commemorated seven weeks or 49 days after Passover; if we include the day of Passover, the feast falls 50 days later.

The answer to the “Why Now?” question. The irony and symbolism of the Spirit’s timing are brilliant. On Shavuot in Old Testament, God gifted the Torah “the Law” to the Jewish people and wrote His Commandments on tables of stone to Moses on Mount Sinai. And Judaism said that salvation comes from adhering to that Law and to those Commandments. On Pentecost God delivered...from Jesus’ teachings, from the Jesus Way, a new law, Jesus said, “today I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.” On this Pentecost, this new law, this new commandment, was not written on stone but written on our hearts, and the hearts of all who heard and who continue hear with the help of some illiterate Galileans, and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We say, “Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s People.” On that first Pentecost, what was the Spirit saying? That there is a new law, a new commandment, a New Way that we received on that day. The Jesus Way. And that Way is universal, open to all...every country, and in every language, it can be heard, known and understood. Belief in Jesus’ teaching, death and resurrection...The Jesus Way was the Spirit’s gift on that First Pentecost in Jerusalem, and it is still the Spirit’s gift to us on this Pentecost today, here in Vancouver.

On that First Pentecost, some Elders thought that the disciples were crazy or drunk on “new wine.” Acts tells us, “in our own languages, we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power. All were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But other’s sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new

wine.’ But Peter standing with the eleven, spoke, ‘The prophet says that I will pour out my Spirit upon all, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams. And everyone who calls on the Lord, shall be saved.’”

“Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people...” Prophecy, visions, dreams?

No, not new wine, Saints... but a New Way.... The Jesus Way.