

Pentecost Sunday, Year C
The Reverend D. S. Mote, PhD
St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
June 5, 2022
Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Romans 8:4-17
John 14:8-17, (25-27)

Pride and Pentecost

They were all together in one place. They had been all together in one place a lot for the last fifty-plus days. They were all together on a Thursday night at a supper when Jesus blessed bread and broke it and gave it to them and said, “This is my body” and blessed wine and gave it to them and said, “This is my blood.”

They had been together after that supper until late in the night, the wee hours of the morning, when the authorities had arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. At that point, they flew off in all directions for a while. On a very terrible Friday as Jesus was executed, most of them lay low and stayed away for fear they would be next to be arrested and possibly killed. Only a few, mostly women, had stood at the foot of the cross. Only a few women had dared on that Sunday morning to visit the tomb where their lynched leader had been laid. The rest of them were still hiding.

When Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles, brought the impossibly good news that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that she had encountered him, the rest of them could hardly take it in. But in response, they came back together. And that night, when they were once again all back together in one place—fearful and behind locked doors, but together—Jesus appeared among them, speaking peace, offering evidence, and giving them their new assignment. He gave them peace. Repeatedly, he said, “Peace be with you.” *I give you peace not as the world gives to you, but I give you my peace. My peace I give you; my peace I leave with you.* And what’s the point of that? Not just to make us feel better but to empower us to be people of peace in this world.

For forty days, at various times, Jesus kept appearing to these men and women who had followed him along the way throughout his ministry. He appeared to a pair of them on the road to Emmaus on the evening of Resurrection Day and later to a smaller fishing group of them on the shores of Galilee and a bunch of other times, too, according to the gospels. But especially he appeared when they were gathered together in one place. They kept gathering, and he kept showing up, in resurrected yet recognizable form.

On the fortieth day after his resurrection, the resurrected Jesus, the living Christ, departed from the top of a mountain. That’s what we call the Ascension. Once again, they weren’t sure what to do next. But he had said they should stay in Jerusalem

until they were filled with power. Right about then they were mostly filled with perplexity. Again.

However unlikely it seemed at the time, over and over, what he said kept turning out to be what happened, even if not quite like they imagined. So, for ten days they hung out, waiting in Jerusalem. Waiting for the next thing to happen. What would the next thing be? How would they know when it had arrived? Hurry up and wait.

Have you ever waited like this for the next thing, mostly or at least somewhat confident that eventually it will occur but not quite sure when or how, not quite sure if you can hold on till then? Afraid when it does arrive you might somehow miss it 'cause you don't know what to expect exactly?

I've waited like that a number of times, and during this protracted season of Coronatide or Pandemia or whatever we will call it, ultimately, I did a lot of waiting and wondering. What is the next thing in my life? What is the next place where I'm supposed to serve? I looked at lots of possibilities. I was offered some, but I was turned down for lots more. And then, suddenly, apparently out of nowhere but so right on time, I was invited to come and visit for a second interview with the oldest congregation south of St Augustine, St Paul's, Key West. That was a year ago in April, and guess what? One year ago today, in this place, I was installed as the thirty-fourth rector of St Paul's, Key West. Sometimes we just have to wait, even when we don't know exactly what will come along. But if we can hold on, eventually things will come 'round right.

I'm so glad to be here and so glad that not only am I the thirty-fourth rector of St Paul's, I'm the first woman rector of St Paul's and the first lesbian rector of St Paul's. I'm not gonna say I'm the first queer rector of St Paul's because there are pictures of my predecessors in the historic rectory. And if you look at some of them you're like, "Ummm, I don't know." So, maybe not the first LGBTQIA+ rector, but the first dyke nonetheless.

So, sometimes we just have to wait. And we don't know for how long. But that's how it works.

So, they were waiting, and in that waiting they were doing what they knew to do. They weren't sure what was going to happen next. They weren't sure how they would know. But Jesus said, "Wait."

And on the fiftieth day after the Resurrection, the day of Pentecost, the community that had gathered around Jesus, male and female, about 120 of them, Acts says, waited together and were "constantly devoting themselves to prayer."

They took steps while they waited to choose a replacement for Judas. They chose Matthias. They paid attention to one another. They did what was indicated so far as they could tell even as they waited for the next, clear thing.

And so, when the day of Pentecost had come, I think they were still surprised.

Suddenly, Acts says, from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Is it just me, or does that sound kinda like a description of a tropical storm? It was a big, mighty, violent wind; a *big* noise.

Today is the one hundredth day since Transfiguration Sunday. Starting on that Sunday and throughout the forty days of Lent plus the Sundays in Lent we embarked upon a period of discernment as a community, on a community retreat, asking and thinking about over and over and over: in this season, at this time, in this place, what are we called to let go? And what are we called to take up? What is God calling us to at this time, in this season as individuals and as a community?

And so, I'm wondering, after all that pondering and discerning and after all this celebrating for the past seven weeks, the Great 50 Days of Easter since Easter Day, what have you heard and felt?

Have there been holy nudges, divine whispers? Has there been a great rushing wind that took you off guard and got your attention and kind of scared you but also delighted you because it was part of what you needed to figure out what is yours to do?

Is God calling you to something eminently practical right in your own backyard? Is it something that will stretch and grow you far beyond St Paul's and Key West?

Tongues of fire appeared among them, and a tongue of fire rested on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, *as the Spirit gave them ability*.

What is the language you can speak that needs to be spoken? What is the truth of your life and your experience that somebody else, perhaps people near and dear to you, need to hear? Perhaps a truth that is so precious you hesitate to say it out loud for fear of being misunderstood and maybe not for the first time.

If somehow somewhere along the way someone or perhaps many someones have told you that you aren't welcome, that you are not enough, or that you are too much, or that you don't belong, or that you can't really be a Christian because of your

sexuality, who you are, whom you love, we have a different message here. Whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey, you are welcome in this place and at this table.

The reading from Romans today, the words of St Paul our patron, make it perfectly clear: “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” All. We have not been given a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. We have received a spirit of adoption. Adoption as God’s children.

It’s true for all of us, and it has been all along. Nobody can take it away. And even if all you have ever heard from “religious” people, or people claiming the name of Christian—possibly including the people who brought you into the world and brought you up—if all you have ever heard from them is that there is something wrong with you if you aren’t straight and cisgender, that teaching is wrong. That teaching is in error. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are all God’s beloveds, from the beginning of days until the end of time and throughout eternity.

Tongues of fire appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. Here’s the thing about tongues of fire, these powerful and active symbols of the gifts of the Spirit: we can’t necessarily see the ones over our own heads. The community can help us name and identify them. We can help one another parse and claim, discover, discern, our own spiritual gifts. There might be one burning in your heart that you are afraid to tell anybody about. But the Holy Spirit has ways that move like water and dance like fire. And chances are a tongue of fire will become visible over your head, as it were, to people with whom you dare to be in community, to people with whom you gather regularly in one place, where the living Christ continues to show up in resurrected but recognizable form.

Acts tells us that on that Pentecost there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living and staying in Jerusalem. They were gathered together to celebrate one of their three principal festivals of the year: Pentecost, meaning fifty days; Shavuot in Hebrew, also called the Feast of Weeks—seven weeks of seven days each, forty-nine days, and on the fiftieth days, Pentecost, celebrating the barley harvest and also the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Acts also tells us that there were not only Jews from every nation under heaven but also people from other religious traditions and other ethnic backgrounds.

Jews among had a common written language in Hebrew, but they spoke many different spoken languages and dialect. The community that gathered around Jesus began to speak that morning in other languages, *as the Spirit gave them ability*. At that moment, in the midst of a noisy festival crowd, every single person could

discern their own dialect, their most familiar down-home lingo. Everyone had that experience of saying, *I understand. I can hear you. I feel at home.* A common language amidst many diverse languages.

The people in Jerusalem that day asked, “How is it that we hear, each of us in our own native language?” All were amazed and perplexed, and they said to each other, “What does this mean?”

Peter piped up and declared, “Y’all, we’re not drunk. It’s too early for that. This is what the prophet Joel foretold centuries ago: the young see visions; the old dream dreams; God’s Spirit is poured out with power upon all human bodies.” All.

People from all over understood a fresh message with a familiar accent, an old song in a new key. On this Day of Pentecost, this Pride Sunday, and this first anniversary of my installation as the thirty-fourth rector of St Paul’s, I hope you are hearing the good news that everyone is welcome to be a part of the Jesus Movement, and everyone, *everyone*, is God’s own beloved child.

We don’t all possess the same gifts and aptitudes. But we each have our own. And these gifts and aptitudes and graces are to be explored and developed and shared.

Everybody is not called to the same thing, but everybody is called to something. And not called to drudgery but to joy. What makes your heart sing? What is the thing that, when you do it, you feel truly alive? What is it you sense deep down that the Spirit is leading you to? Go there. And do that. You are sure to meet the living Christ on the way and in the midst of it.

And on this day of celebration and joy, the storm over, the sun out brightly again, let us delight in coming together in one place and then coming together to this table where we will enjoy a banquet prepared from the foundation of the world, a holy meal, a sacred sacrifice made for us. Come to this table and experience being forgiven, healed, renewed. And then let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ’s body in and for the world.