

What Does This Mean?

Questions from Acts: Part 7 “What Does This Mean?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 19th 2024

Pentecost

Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Reflection: Psalm 104

Greeting: I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, And your young men will see visions.

Prayer: Almighty God, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit as shown to the disciples on Pentecost. Help us to celebrate the guidance that we receive that we may share with the world. As we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ the Son, help us to share the gift of love we find in you our Heavenly Father, and guide us in the truth of your Holy Spirit. May we be one with each other as we are one in Christ Jesus. May we love you with our whole being, and may we share that love with one another. And may we be reminded of your redeeming grace and steadfast faithfulness all the days of our lives. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 104

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, great and wide; creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 104:24-34, 35b NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 104, and we hear of the glory of the Lord. That God’s Holy Spirit is with us in all creation. How do you celebrate the Holy Spirit as a part of your life? Do you pray for the guidance of the Spirit? Do you stop to listen for a reply? Who will you lift up in your prayers this week? How will you share the Holy Spirit with the people in your life? How can you share the love of Christ with others in the week to come? What are you discovering as you live out your life in Christ?

Prayer: O God, when all things come to their end, you bring us into the city of resurrection of your Son. Shelter every nation and tongue with your Spirit, and feed us all with joy unending. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. We share with you the worries that we have spoken aloud. We share the celebrations that we have voiced together. Help us to also share the silent pleadings from within. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in rejoicing, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 2, verse 1 through 21.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—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 others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: '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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' (Acts 2:1-21 NRSV*)

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 8, verse 22 through 27.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan

inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 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 groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:22-27 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 15, verse 26 through 27 and chapter 16, verse 4 through 15.

[Jesus said] "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, our last question in this series happens on Pentecost with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. And we hear this question uttered by the crowd in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The scene is that the followers of Jesus have all been in one place unsure of what comes next. It is then the Holy Spirit, shown as tongues of fire, descends upon them. They begin to speak in other languages proclaiming the good news. Now, there are people from all over the place there in Jerusalem. When they hear this, they recognize the languages being spoken. They hear what people are saying and they are amazed because they can understand. And they're confused because these are all supposed to be Galileans and they're speaking in all these other languages. They are speaking about God, about Christ, and about salvation. People from all over are amazed and confused. And as they are perplexed, they asked the question, "what does this mean?" I think that's a question we often still ask today trying to understand the scene. We do hear that others offer the suggestion that they're drunk and I love Peter's rebuttal to that. Peter says that it is in fact too early in the morning and that they haven't had enough time to get drunk. I love Peter for this. But his next response gets more to the issue. He talks about the prophet Joel and about how people will speak the truth of God, that they will have visions, they will dream dreams, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord

will be saved. And this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is something we heard about in our gospel reading from John when Jesus talks about the advocate that will come. That the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the disciples. That when they are in need of direction, the Holy Spirit will come to give them guidance and it will guide them to the truth. That we will find salvation by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the truth of Christ that reveals God to us. We hear of that hope that we have in Christ from Romans when Paul talks about the first fruits of the Spirit. That the Spirit helps us with our weakness. That the Spirit helps us to pray and that the Spirit helps us to focus our prayers on what truly matters and helps us to connect with God.

I really started thinking about this question that we have. What does this mean? Because I think there are things that we might take away from this that can confuse us more than help us. There are some things that we may notice that cause us to have more questions. One of the things that I wanted to address is something that I had been asked at various times and I don't know that I've ever quite covered it here. And that is the way that the disciples begin speaking in other languages, or we might call it speaking in tongues. I want to highlight what it means for us in our understanding of the way the Spirit works. Because there's a lot of ideas about speaking in tongues that don't really match up with what we see in this celebration of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. I say this because I think it's important for us to know what is happening here in the early church so that we know how to respond in today's church. One of the issues is that when they speak in tongues, they're speaking in languages other people can understand. They are not simply saying things that nobody can understand. It is not just random syllables and sounds coming out of their mouths. One of the highlights of them speaking in tongues is that everyone can understand what they are saying. Because the gift of being able to speak in these other languages is not to highlight anything about the person speaking. It is not shown as something that creates confusion in the message, but instead the purpose is to clear up confusion. The reason they speak in tongues is because there are so many people there that speak in different languages. To reach them all, they speak in the native tongues of those people in Jerusalem so that they can understand the message more clearly. I find this to be an important piece of knowledge, because too often speaking in tongues becomes somebody standing up and speaking something no one can understand. When I compare that to what happens at Pentecost, there is no comparison. Because Pentecost is about making God's word clear. The purpose of this is to allow more people to experience Christ through the Holy Spirit. Their confusion is not about what they cannot understand because of a language barrier. Their confusion is that the barrier has been removed. They may not understand how, but they understand the words that are being spoken. Because the Holy Spirit doesn't bring confusion, it brings clarification. The Holy Spirit does not cause division, the Holy Spirit tears down barriers. The Holy Spirit is not there to have some feel superior because of their gift. The Holy Spirit is there that we may be humbled in the presence of a Spirit that let's all stand on equal footing. I could not get past this section without mentioning this because I do think that we should fully understand what Pentecost means and

what the Holy Spirit is there to do. I say this so that we may understand the early church and may share the spirit of outreach and growth.

Another thing that might confuse us is the word prophesy. This one can become an issue because of some of the notions that we attach to prophesying. Often when we think about prophesying, we attach a future message to it. There's going to be some sort of fortune telling involved. And I think the problem with a fortune telling method is that it ignores what it meant to be a prophet. Because a prophet was somebody who spoke the truth of God, that had God's message, and that delivered God's message. That it does not have to be related to the future. It can be here and now. It can be an eternal truth. It can be many things but does not necessarily have to be predicting a future event. And I bring this one up to clear up another misconception that can come from our understanding of what is being said on this miraculous occasion. Because Peter talks about people prophesying as part of having the Holy Spirit. Too often that becomes this idea that they will proclaim events that happen in the future and our entire idea of prophecy becomes hinged on foretelling future events. But prophecy has a much wider range. It can include that but that's because it's part of what God is telling his people. But God also has messages for us in the here and the now. God also has messages that have been the same from of old. When we hear the prophetic voice saying that we should love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, that is not telling us of some grand future event. That is telling us what we should be doing and what has been commanded from of old, but knowing it makes it no less God's message to us. I highlight this because we can sometimes think that the only message we will ever get is divine revelation about the future, and not divine revelation about our hearts and lives in the here and now. I open that door because prophecy is so much more. It is proclaiming God's message. It is the good news of Jesus Christ. It is singing the message that God has given. We see that from Miriam in the Old Testament when she gives prophecy in song. Because the truth is that God's message can come to us in many ways. Because God will find every way possible to reach out to us to guide us and to lead us. That's part of why we have the Spirit. It is for that guidance and leadership, that direct presence in our lives to help us to grow and to learn and to become something more because we embrace the good news of Jesus Christ. This is part of how we continue to live a life in Christ, by proclaiming this message and accepting that God may reveal things to us that we are to reveal to others. But it is also that God may reveal things to us that are placed on our hearts because we need them.

I brought up these examples because this question kept bringing me back to them. Because the question really is "what does this mean?" and we have to understand what is happening to say that we understand it. Because for me, the idea of Pentecost is that God is opening the floodgates and letting the Holy Spirit run through us all. That we may have that connection. That we are connected to one another through the Holy Spirit. That we are connected to Christ, the Son through the Holy Spirit. That we are connected to God the Father through the Holy Spirit. That through the Holy Spirit we may prophesy, we may dream dreams, and we may have visions. We may communicate clearly with each other, and we may help

each other in love. That we grow together because the Holy Spirit has placed that love in our hearts. The Holy Spirit helps us to follow that guidance to get where God needs us to be, a place where we may share the good news of Jesus Christ most efficiently. A place where we may reach those who are in the most need. That the ears longing for hope may hear of Christ's blessings. That people yearning, longing for something more here of the changes that a life in Christ can bring. And for me, that's what Pentecost means. It means that the love and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is there for all people to help them to discover the love of Christ and to live it. And so, as we finish out this Easter series with this message, I pray that we may find ways to communicate more clearly. I pray that we may support each other even more. I pray that we may share the good news of Jesus Christ anywhere and everywhere. Because the Holy Spirit is there for us and the Holy Spirit is there for the hearts of others to let them experience God's love and God's peace even more than they could apart from it. So let us proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord, that all may hear and that all may have hope in the truth of our Savior. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Questions from Acts

Our Easter series explores questions that we will take from our readings from the Acts of the Apostles. Each week we will reflect on the early church and the lessons we learn from the questions that they press us to answer.

April 7th – Who Is In Need?

April 21st – By What Name?

May 5th – Can Anyone Withhold?

May 19th – What Does This Mean?

April 14th – Whose Power Is This?

April 28th – What Is to Prevent Me?

May 12th – Who Will Witness?

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Marie R.
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks	

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