

FEAST OF PENTECOST 2022

JUNE 5, 2022

GENESIS 11:1-9

ACTS 2:1-23

JOHN 15:8-17, 25-27

GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU FROM OUR GOD WHOSE SPIRIT BLOWS THROUGH OUR LIVES WITH THE PROMISE OF JESUS CHRIST. AMEN

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH..AND WHILE THERE MIGHT BE UNDERSTANDABLE REASONS FOR SUCH A DESCRIPTION.. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT LEAVING IT SIMPLY AS THAT .. LEAVES US WITH A STATIC OBSERVANCE OF A TIME IN HISTORY WHOSE ONLY PURPOSE NOW MIGHT BE AN OCCASION FOR A CAKE..

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO NOTE THAT THIS DAY IS NOT A HISTORY LESSON.. BUT RATHER IT IS THE PROMISE THAT THE SAME HOLY SPIRIT PRESENT AT THAT FIRST PENTECOST IS HERE WITH US NOW..

But HOW THEN TO IMAGINE THIS? SOME MEDIEVAL CATHEDRALS HAD A VIVID WAY TO IMAGINE THE ON-GOING MOVEMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. TO DO SO TRAP DOORS CALLED “HOLY SPIRIT HOLES” WERE BUILT INTO THE CEILINGS OF THESE CHURCHES..

AND WHAT HAPPENED ON THIS FEAST DAY ...WAS THAT DURING THE READING OF THE PENTECOST STORY.. THE TRAP DOORS WOULD BE OPENED AND FLOCKS OF DOVES WOULD BE RELEASED INTO THE CHURCH.... FOLLOWED BY A MASSIVE AMOUNT OF RED ROSE PETALS.. POURING DOWN UPON THE GATHERED CONGREGATION.. WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CHILDREN’S CHOIRS WOULD RUN THROUGH THE SANCTUARY MAKING WHOOSHING NOISES..

I WONDER IF SUCH DRAMA WOULD GIVE US A BETTER SENSE OF THE SPIRIT AS GOD BEING ACTIVELY PRESENT NOW..

BUT OF COURSE WE DON’T HAVE HOLES IN HOPE’S CEILING.. HOWEVER, WE DO HAVE SOMETHING ELSE.... INSTEAD OF HOLES.. WE HAVE STORIES.. WE HAVE TEXTS.. TEXTS AND STORIES THAT SPEAK TO US REGARDING THE SPIRIT’S LIFE-GIVING ON-GOING MOVEMENT IN THIS WORLD

.. FIRST THEN.. BEFORE US IS AN OLD OLD STORY... FIRST TOLD AROUND NIGHTLY FIRES.. A STORY FIRST TOLD PERHAPS IN ORDER TO EXPLAIN WHY THERE WERE SO MANY LANGUAGES IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY...

IT IS A STORY THAT ARRIVES FROM the shadows of PREHISTORY.. SIMILAR TO THE STORIES OF THE 7 DAYS OF CREATION.. SIMILAR TO THE STORIES OF THE GARDEN .. STORIES THAT REMEMBERED GOD AS THE LIFE GIVING CREATOR.. A SPIRIT HOVERING OVER THE PRIMORDIAL WATERS.. WITH GOD AS WIND AND SPIRIT. BREATHING LIFE INTO OUR LUNGS.. COMMANDING THE HUMANS .. .... GO FORTH AND MULTIPLY AND FILL THE EARTH.. MEANING: SCATTER FAR AND WIDE. OVER THE EARTH TO CARE FOR IT..

... BUT INSTEAD OF SCATTERING .. IN THIS OLD, OLD STORY... HUMANS HAD GATHERED IN ONE PLACE TO BE BRICK AND TOWER MAKERS.. ... TURNING THEIR BACKS ON THE DIVERSITY OF CREATION. .. TURNING THEIR BACKS ON THEIR CREATOR...AND THAT ORIGINAL CALL TO FILL AND SCATTER...

AND SO THE STORY TELLS US.. THAT, IN RESPONSE TO THE EFFORT TO BUILD THEMSELVES UP, GOD GIVES THE GIFT OF A MULTITUDE OF LANGUAGES,,,,, A GIFT GIVEN IN ORDER TO FULFIL GOD'S HOPE FOR THE CREATION... SO THAT WHAT MIGHT FIRST SEEM LIKE A STORY OF PUNISHMENT.. ACTUALLY BECOMES AN OFFER OF BLESSING.. GO !! GO FORTH... SCATTER .. FAR AND WIDE FOR THE SAKE OF LIFE

BUT STILL LATER THIS OLD, OLD STORY WAS also TOLD AS A JOKE.. A VERY SERIOUS JOKE.. OF COURSE.. AS IT WAS TOLD BY ISRAEL WHEN IN EXILE IN BABYLON.. WHERE AGAIN... LIKE THEIR SLAVE ANCESTERS IN EGYPT THEY WERE OPPRESSED BY ANOTHER EMPIRE... ANOTHER SYSTEM OF DOMINATION

IT IS A STORY TOLD IN PARODY AGAINST THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE .. FAMOUS FOR ITS ZIGGARUT TOWERS ... IT WAS AN EMPIRE THAT SOUGHT TO FIND UNITY IN ITS ABILITY TO CONTROL AND MANIPULATE PEOPLES AND THE ENVIRONMENT ITSELF... SEEKING TO DOMINATE AND HOMOGENIZE THE RICH DIVERSITY PRESENT IN GOD'S CREATION

UNABLE TO RECOGNIZE GOD - EMPIRES ALWAYS SEEK THEIR OWN GLORY. BUT THIS JOKE PROMISES THAT EMPIRES ALSO WILL END UP CONFOUNDED BY THE DIVERSITY OF CREATION WHICH CANNOT BE MONO--TONED...

... and thus THIS IS A STORY WE STILL RECOGNIZE IN OUR WORLD.. A WORLD WHERE WE also BUILD OUR TOWERS AND WALLS..SEEKING TO SEPARATE OURSELVES FROM OTHERS EVEN AS WE ALSO SEEK TO MAKE NAMES FOR OURSELVES..

IT IS AN OLD, OLD STORY... AN OLD, OLD JOKE.. AND YET.. IT IS ONE THAT REMINDS US OF THE DIVISIONS THAT REMAIN IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY.. BUT NOW .. ON THIS DAY.. WE ARE GIVEN A PENTECOST WORD THAT RESPONDS TO OUR HUMAN DIVISIONS AND ALIENATIONS



BUT IT IS NOT SO.. SAYS PETER..INSTEAD PETER SPEAKS TO THE CROWDS OF THIS JESUS CRUCIFIED AND RISEN FROM THE DEAD.. JESUS - WHO IS THE VERY LIFE GIVING PRESENCE OF GOD OFFERED TO AN ACHING WORLD..

AND FROM HERE, AS THE BOOK OF ACTS CONTINUES, WE HEAR OF THE RESULTS OF THIS HEARING IN THE MIDST OF A CAUCOPHANY OF LANGUAGES.. .

THIS POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT... CONTINUES IN CHAPTER AFTER CHAPTER.... WHERE.. BARRIERS OF GENDER, ETHNICITY, RACE, CLASS AND SEXUALITY ARE DISTURBED AND OVER TURNED BY THIS SPIRIT-FILLED WIND-DRIVEN FIRE OF GOD'S EMBRACE..

THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS WE ENCOUNTER THE SPIRIT'S FREEDOM TO BLOW WHERE IT WILLS AND TO BURN THROUGH THE CHAFF THAT PLUGS OUR EARS.. SO THAT WE MIGHT HEAR AGAIN THE PROMISE OF OUR GOD FOR CREATION.

HERE IS REVEALED THE SPIRIT WHO IS FREE TO REST UPON ANY AND ALL FLESH.. RESTING NOT ONLY ON THOSE WHO CLAIM SPECIAL PRIVILEGE BUT EVEN THOSE OUTSIDE THE CAMP... THOSE OUTSIDE ACCEPTABLE BOUNDARIES..

AND LIKE THE BABEL STORY.. THE BOOK OF ACTS TESTIFIES TO A NEW SCATTERING.. A SCATTERING THAT CELEBRATES THE MOVEMENT OF GOD INTO THE WHOLE CREATION FOR THE SAKE OF LIFE..

IT IS THIS SPIRIT THAT JESUS PROMISES HIS FOLLOWERS... IT IS THIS SPIRIT THAT COMES TO THE HUDDLED DISCIPLES ON THAT FIRST PENTECOST... AND NOW COMES AGAIN..TODAY!! BRINGING THE THICK PROCLAMATION OF GOOD NEWS TO THE BABBLING OF THIS WORLD'S FLATTENED IMAGINATIONS AND EMPTY WORDS...

THE SPIRIT COMES TO OPEN EARS AND LOOSEN TONGUES. COMING TO BRING VISIONS TO THE YOUNG AND DREAMS TO THE OLD.... A WIND TEARING APART SYSTEMS OF EXCLUSION... A FIRE .... BURNING DOWN WALLS THAT KEEP THINGS IN ORDER AND UNDER CONTROL

FOR HERE IS THE SAME SPIRIT WHO HOVERED OVER THE CHAOS WATERS OF GENESIS AND WHO BIRTHED LIFE... THE SPIRIT WHO BID ABRAHAM AND SARAH TO LEAVE HOME AND JOIN THE SCATTERING... TO GO TO AN UNKNOWN PLACE THAT GOD WOULD SHOW THEM.... THIS IS THE SPIRIT THAT HOVERED OVER MARY WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF ONE WHO WOULD COME TO LIFT UP THE LOWLY AND BRING DOWN THE MIGHTY... ..

AND YET... DESPITE THE POWER OF THESE VIVID IMAGES OF WIND AND FIRE .... THE REAL THREAT AND GIFT OF THE SPIRIT LIES NOT IN THESE IMAGES .... BUT RATHER IN ITS PARTICULAR CALLING... IN THE SPIRIT'S CALLING TO FOLLOW... .... TO GO FORTH IN THE PATTERN AND SHAPE OF THE LIFE OF THIS JESUS...

FOR THE SPIRIT CALLS US TO FOLLOW JESUS.. WHOSE LIFE WAS ONE NOT OF HOARDING LIFE BUT OF LETTING GO ...

AND SO..WE READ IN ACTS THAT THESE SPIRIT FILLED FOLKS.. DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING AND FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THAT ALL WHO WERE TOUCHED BY THE SPIRIT WOULD SELL THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS AND DISTRIBUTE THE PROCEEDS TO ANY IN NEED..

AND THEN THE BOOK OF ACTS CHRONICLES THIS FOLLOWING IN THE SCATTERING ... AS IT KEEPS PILING ON WITH ITS STORIES OF THE EMBRACE OF THE GENTILES IN ASIA, THE WELCOME OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, ROMAN OFFICERS, AND ROMANS JAILERS, WOMEN LEADERS AND EVEN UNCIRCUMCISED PEASANTS, AND SOPHISTICATED PHILOSOPHERS..

BEFORE US THEN IS A WITNESS TO THE ACTIVITY AND WORK OF THIS SPIRIT.. ONE THAT IS NOT SIMPLY A REMEMBRANCE OR A CALLING TO SOME SPIRITUAL RETREAT BUT A CALLING INTO THE RICH TEXTURES OF DAILY LIVING. .AND INTO THE MESSY GIFTEDNESS OF A DIVERSE CREATION.

THIS TEXT INVITES US TO LISTEN AND TO IMAGINE... AND THEN TO LIVE IN THE PROMISE OF THE VISION OF GOD....

AND GOD KNOWS WE NEED THIS VISION...

DEAR FRIENDS... WE LIVE IN THE MIDST OF A SOCIETY FULL OF NOISY GONGS AND CLANGING CYMBOLS .FULL OF SPEECH THAT FLATTENS OUR HOPES.AND CLOGS OUR EARS ..A SOCIETY FULL OF VERBAL TRANSACTIONS THAT LESS RESEMBLE CONVERSATIONS AND MORE RESEMBLE BUMPER STICKERS.. FULL OF VIOLENT LANGUAGE AND VIOLENT ACTIONS.

BEATEN DOWN UNDER THE ONSLAUGHT OF IMAGES AND WORDS OF VIOLENCE AND OF A GROANING EARTH... WE ARE TEMPTED TO FLEE INTO THE NUMBING DISTRACTIONS OF OUR TOXIC CULTURE..

AND SO WE ARE DEEPLY IN NEED OF GOD'S SPIRIT!! SO DEEPLY IN NEED OF THE FIRE AND WIND THAT WILL BURN AND BLOW AWAY THE LIES AND ILLUSIONS.. THAT WE USE IN ORDER TO MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES..

FOR THIS IS THE SPIRIT WHO BRINGS US THE IMAGINATION OF EZEKIEL WHO SEES NEW LIFE EVEN IN A VALLEY OF DRY BONES

A SPIRIT THAT STIRS THE IMAGINATION OF THE PROPHET MICAH WHO SEES THAT SWORDS WOULD BE POUNDED INTO PLOWSHARES AND SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS.

IT IS THE SPIRIT FILLED IMAGINATION OF JOHN EXILED ON THE ISLAND OF PATMOS TESTIFYING TO THE END OF EMPIRE WITH THE LAMB AT THE CENTER OF A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH..

WE ARE THOSE IN NEED OF SUCH IMAGINATION.. IN ORDER TO SEE THE END OF THE BABEL OF OUR CULTURE'S BREAD AND CIRCUS'S.. THE END OF THE OLD SENDING THE YOUNG OFF TO WAR IN ORDER TO MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES ..

IT IS THIS SPIRIT WHO COMES.. SO THAT WE MIGHT IMAGINE AN EARTH RENEWED.. AND IMAGINE A CHURCH THAT IS DARING AND FAITHFUL .. RISING AGAIN FROM THE DEAD.. AS A PEOPLE FAITHFUL TO GOD'S FUTURE..

SO THAT EVEN AS THE SLAUGHTERS IN TEXAS, BUFFALO, TULSA AND THE UKRAINE AND SO MANY OTHER PLACES NOW CONSPIRE TO OVERWHELM US EVEN WHEN ALL OUR HOPES SEEMS ONLY TO BE DUST IN THE WIND.. WE ARE REMINDED OF THE SPIRIT WHOSE BREATH FORMS LIFE OUT OF DUST..

THIS THEN IS THE SPIRIT THAT COMES HERE NOW TO OPEN OUR EYES AND EARS AND OUR VERY LIVES . IT IS THIS SPIRIT THAT BIDS US COME, COME TO THE TABLE.. COME AND EAT... COME AND HEAR THE WORDS.. GIVEN FOR YOU AND SHED FOR YOU.. CALLING US TO BREATH IN GOD'S LIFE GIVING BREATH AND THEN TO GO.. TO FOLLOW THIS JESUS INTO THE WORLD ... POURING OUT GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD..