

June 9, 2019

Today is one of the great days of the church's year, but it always feels like it is overlooked and only barely understood. I'm sure that part of this is the fatigue that all of us can feel over "too much." You have Easter, you have Christmas all in less than 6 months. You really can't market Pentecost [What? Hats with shooting flames? It's an idea!] as it's not that sort of day. Plus, it's at the beginning of the summer and our attention is somewhere else. But I want you to join me in this day and I want you to feel like you are beginning to be clothed with some new power, even if it is only your socks.

I think that to properly grasp this day, I need to remind you of two Bible stories. The first is one from the earliest Bible stories, the story of the tower of Babel. If you remember that story, everyone had the same language and humanity had this arrogance that it could be god along with God and started building this tower to get to God. If you remember that story, God comes down and dilutes their power – which, interestingly, is the power of communication. And the world drifts off into groups of people who spend their lives misunderstanding God and each other.

The second story is really an insight from the great Presbyterian preacher Tom Long. Long was reading the Acts story you just heard and realized something; he realized that most of the people St Luke lists in his story who are hearing the story of the Apostles were people who were dead. Parthians and Medes and Elamites no longer existed. And Long had the insight that in Jesus, and in the pouring out of the Spirit – something that used to be available to only kings and prophets – that in all of this God is remaking the world, the past and the present. All in Jesus. That God, in Jesus through the Apostles who have been given the very power of God, will remake the world. God is taking us back to that first story and giving us the very presence of God and is remaking community through the image of the resurrected Jesus.

But you need to remember one other story, the Roman story. When this original story was being told, there was one other power in the world that promised peace and prosperity and that was Caesar in Rome. And if you fell in line and if you paid your taxes and if you acknowledged the power of Rome in the temple and worship Caesar, the world would be safe. And if you didn't, Rome was willing to send an army or two to persuade you. When this story was being first told, there was another would-be unifier of the world – Caesar and all of his power.

And when we keep reading the story, we find out what we always knew, there are a lot of people left out of that story: the poor, the widows, the orphan, the slave, a whole bunch of women, the sick. And the power of the first Apostles was that they gathered these people together and formed a community. And the reason they changed the world was because they gave people a new story. The story of Jesus gives that to people, and it is the heart of the power of the Gospel. It gives us new stories. It reshapes the story of our lives, good or bad, broken or whole.

When we start telling people the story of Jesus, the center of the story is not just you get to go to heaven when you die. The story of Jesus is that we are reshaped into the community of people who are able to see the world through God's eyes. We understand our community, other people and ourselves through the eyes of Jesus. And this is the undoing of the brokenness of the world that has existed since the time of Babel and keeps trying to raise its head even in our world.

The message of Pentecost is that we are commissioned to be God's partners in rebuilding the world and the promise of Jesus is that he will send whatever strength is necessary to make certain it happens. And it doesn't matter who you are, young or old, newly born or at the autumn days of your life, God will speak through you, and change the world.

May we have eyes to see and ears to hear the Spirit's presence in us and in the world.

Amen.

Pastor Erdos
The Day of Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21