

Acts 2:1-21  
May 23, '10

"HERE, THERE & EVERYWHERE"

I HAD INITIALLY GIVEN THIS SERMON ANOTHER TITLE.

ACTUALLY, IT HAD SEVERAL DIFFERENT TITLES.

I WAS THINKING OF THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING MESSAGE OF PENTECOST AND THOUGHT OF CALLING IT  
"ACROSS THE UNIVERSE."

BUT THEN I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE MORE IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON THE UNITY THAT WAS EXPERIENCED  
ON THAT DAY BY THE BELIEVERS & I CONSIDERED "ALL TOGETHER NOW" OR MAYBE "COME TOGETHER."

AS YOU CAN SEE, I'VE GONE BACK TO THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE MESSAGE & JUST DECIDED TO CALL IT  
"HERE, THERE & EVERYWHERE."

I'M NOT GOING TO DWELL ON THE TITLE BUT SOME OF YOU MAY REALIZE THAT ALL FOUR OF THE  
OPTIONS I CONSIDERED ALSO HAPPEN TO BE TITLES OF SONGS WRITTEN BY THE BEATLES.

BASICALLY, WHETHER WE'RE REFERRING TO TIME OR SPACE, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS "HERE, THERE &  
EVERYWHERE."

WE HAVE A TENDENCY – FOR OBVIOUS REASONS – TO USE HOLIDAYS AS A WAY TO COMMEMORATE  
SPECIFIC EVENTS.

IT'S OBVIOUS BECAUSE, AFTER ALL, ISN'T THAT WHAT HOLIDAYS ARE FOR?

FOR EXAMPLE, NEXT WEEK WE WILL OBSERVE MEMORIAL DAY – A TIME TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO  
LOST THEIR LIVES IN SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY IN OUR NATION'S ARMED FORCES.

WHEN WE CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY WE REMEMBER THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF  
INDEPENDENCE.

ON THANKSGIVING, WE REMEMBER THE SACRIFICES MADE BY THE EARLY SETTLERS OF OUR NATION.

THIS IS TRUE OF OUR OWN PERSONAL CELEBRATIONS AS WELL.

WE CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS – AS THE NAME SUGGESTS – ON THE DAY SOMEONE ENTERED THIS WORLD.

WE CELEBRATE WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES ON THE DAY A COUPLE WAS MARRIED.

ALL OF THESE CELEBRATIONS TAKE US BACK TO A PARTICULAR TIME & PLACE AND WE REMEMBER THE  
EVENT BEING COMMEMORATED.

AND YET, FOR THE EVENT TO CONTINUE TO HAVE MEANING FOR US TODAY, WE HAVE TO DO MORE WITH  
IT, DON'T WE?

WHEN WE OBSERVE MEMORIAL DAY, WE'RE NOT JUST REMEMBERING THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN  
SERVICE – WE'RE PRAYING FOR THE DAY TO COME WHEN WARS WILL CEASE & PEACE WILL PREVAIL.

ON INDEPENDENCE DAY, WE REFLECT UPON OUR OWN RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR NATION.

ON THANKSGIVING, WE REJOICE IN GOD'S CONTINUED BLESSINGS UPON US.

BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES AREN'T JUST A TIME TO REMEMBER THE DAY OF SOMEONE'S BIRTH OR THE DAY OF A COUPLE'S WEDDING, BUT TO REJOICE IN ALL THAT HAS TRANSPIRED SINCE & EXTEND OUR PRAYERS & HOPES FOR THEM IN THE FUTURE.

THIS SAME PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO OUR RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AS WELL.

IN OUR CHRISTIAN TRADITION, THERE ARE THREE GREAT FESTIVALS – CHRISTMAS, EASTER & PENTECOST.

THE FIRST TWO CLEARLY OVERSHADOW THE THIRD.

ONE THING ABOUT ALL THREE, THOUGH, THAT IS THE SAME IS THAT THEY'RE NOT MEANT TO BE MERE COMMEMORATIONS.

THEY BECOME MEANINGLESS IF ALL WE DO IS REMEMBER SOMETHING THAT TOOK PLACE "BACK IN THE DAY."

ONE OF THE GREAT HYMNS OF CHRISTMAS PROCLAIMS, "*CAST OUT OUR SIN & ENTER IN, BE BORN IN US TODAY.*"

ONE OF MY FAVORITE EASTER HYMNS THAT I REFER TO EACH YEAR IS "*EVERY MORNING IS EASTER MORNING FROM NOW ON.*"

BOTH THE BIRTH & THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS MUST BE ONGOING EVENTS WITHIN OUR OWN LIVES IF THEY ARE TO HAVE LASTING SIGNIFICANCE FOR US.

THE SAME IS TRUE – AND PERHAPS EVEN MORE SO – FOR OUR OBSERVANCE OF PENECEST.

WE CAN'T GET WRAPPED UP IN SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WAY BACK WHEN IF IT'S GOING TO HAVE ANY REAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR US TODAY.

WE CAN LEARN ALL ABOUT THE PARTICULARS.

WE CAN LEARN THAT THE CHRISTIAN HOLIDAY OF PENTECOST FINDS ITS ORIGIN IN THE JEWISH FEAST OF SHAVUOT (SHAH-VOO-OAT) – THE FEAST OF WEEKS.

WE CAN KNOW THAT IT WAS A HARVEST FESTIVAL IN LATE SPRING WHEN THE FIRST FRUITS WERE PRESENTED TO THE LORD IN THANKSGIVING FOR HIS GRACE AND MERCY TO HIS PEOPLE.

WE CAN KNOW THAT THE FESTIVAL IS SO NAMED BECAUSE IT TOOK PLACE 50 DAYS – OR PENTECOST IN GREEK - AFTER PASSOVER.

AS FAR AS THE PARTICULARS OF THAT FIRST CHRISTIAN PENTECOST, THE LITERAL EVENT AS DESCRIBED BY LUKE IS REALLY PRETTY BIZARRE.

BUT I THINK HE TELLS US THIS STORY AS HE DOES BECAUSE THERE IS GREAT SYMBOLIC MEANING IN EVERYTHING THAT TAKES PLACE HERE.

WHEN YOU READ THE ACCOUNT OF PENTECOST, YOU MAY NATURALLY THINK OF THE STORY OF THE TOWER OF BABEL IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

PENTECOST IS A REVERSAL OF BABEL.

THINK ABOUT IT.

AT BABEL, THERE WAS BUT ONE LANGUAGE & IT BECAME CONFUSED.

IN JERUSALEM, THERE WERE MANY LANGUAGES, YET ALL WERE SUDDENLY COMPREHENSIBLE.

AT BABEL, THE PEOPLE WERE SCATTERED.

IN JERUSALEM, "EVERY NATION" COMES TOGETHER.

AT BABEL, EARTH TRIED BUILDING ITS WAY TO HEAVEN.

IN JERUSALEM, HEAVEN REACHES DOWN TO EARTH.

AT BABEL, THE HUMAN EGO WAS CONDEMNED.

IN JERUSALEM, THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS RENEWED.

AT BABEL, WE SAW DIVINE FRUSTRATION.

IN JERUSALEM, WE WITNESS DIVINE DELIGHT.

AT BABEL, WE LOOK INTO A MIRROR.

IN JERUSALEM, WE GAZE THROUGH A WINDOW – A WINDOW THAT REVEALS A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN ON EARTH.

I THINK ONE OF THE THINGS LUKE IS CLEARLY TRYING TO TELL US IN THIS STORY IS THAT IN THIS EVENT THE STORY OF BABEL HAS BEEN REVERSED – PEOPLE BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF OTHERS.

THERE IS ALSO OBVIOUS SYMBOLIC MEANING IN THE TONGUES OF FIRE ABOVE THE HEADS OF THE BELIEVERS.

THEY BURNED WITH A PASSION FOR THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST.

WITH THE TONGUES OF FIRE APPEARING & THE LANGUAGE BARRIER DISAPPEARING, LUKE IS TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT FOR OUR LIVES TODAY.

HE'S IMPLORING US TO RECOGNIZE THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR VERY MIDST.

HE'S CHALLENGING US TO SEE ITS POWER & RECOGNIZE ITS MOVEMENT.

HE'S BEGGING US TO OPEN OUR EYES TO THE THINGS THAT GOD IS DOING ALL AROUND US & WITHIN OUR VERY LIVES.

HE WANTS US TO BURN WITH A PASSION FOR THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST.

HOW OFTEN, THOUGH, HAVE WE LISTENED TO LUKE'S MESSAGE?

HOW OFTEN DO WE RECOGNIZE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR VERY MIDST?

HOW OFTEN DO WE SEE ITS POWER & RECOGNIZE ITS MOVEMENT?

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE OPENED OUR EYES TO THE THINGS THAT GOD IS DOING ALL AROUND US & IN OUR VERY LIVES?

I KNOW THAT SOME OF YOU HERE TODAY ARE PROBABLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FINAL EPISODE OF THE TELEVISION SERIES "LOST" THAT WILL AIR TONIGHT.

MANY OF THE REST OF YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT THE SERIES IS ABOUT.

I'M AFRAID I'M ONE WHO HAPPENS TO FALL INTO BOTH CATEGORIES.

I AM BOTH LOOKING FORWARD TO WATCHING THE FINAL EPISODE, BUT ALSO HAVE TO ADMIT THAT – EVEN THOUGH I’VE WATCHED IT PRETTY FAITHFULLY SINCE IT BEGAN – I DON’T HAVE A CLUE AS TO WHAT IT’S ABOUT!

I DO KNOW THIS MUCH, THOUGH.

IT’S ABOUT THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING THAT WE SIMPLY CAN’T UNDERSTAND.

MAYBE THERE AREN’T REALLY SMOKE MONSTERS & POLAR BEARS ON TROPICAL ISLANDS BUT I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAPPEN THAT WE SIMPLY CAN’T UNDERSTAND.

I BELIEVE THE PROPHET ISAIAH WHEN HE WRITES, “*MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, NOR ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS, SAYS THE LORD.*”

I BELIEVE WHAT JESUS SAID TO PETER IN THE UPPER ROOM - “*YOU DO NOT KNOW NOW WHAT I AM DOING, BUT LATER YOU WILL UNDERSTAND.*”

I BELIEVE THE WORDS OF THE HYMN-WRITER WILLIAM COWPER, WHO WROTE – “*GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY, HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM.*”

I BELIEVE THERE ARE THINGS HAPPENING ALL ABOUT US THAT WE SIMPLY CAN’T BEGIN TO COMPREHEND.

I BELIEVE THAT GOD IS WORKING IN OUR MIDST THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

LUKE TELLS US THAT WE SHOULD BURN WITH A PASSION TO TELL OTHERS OF THIS WONDER-WORKING POWER IN THE WORLD TODAY.

THIS ISN’T SOMETHING THAT TOOK PLACE 2,000 YEARS AGO IN JERUSALEM & THEN VANISHED.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS IN OUR VERY MIDST – ON THIS DAY & IN THIS MOMENT & IN THIS PLACE.

DO WE LIVE LIKE WE BELIEVE IT, THOUGH?

THERE WAS A MAN FROM A DIFFERENT CHURCH BACKGROUND WHO WANDERED INTO A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ONE MORNING.

HE GOT VERY EXCITED BY THE SERMON.

HE SAID A FEW THINGS OUT LOUD WHICH MADE THOSE AROUND HIM A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE.

EVENTUALLY, THE MAN GOT SO ENTHUSED THAT HE STOOD UP, WAVED HIS HANDS IN THE AIR & GOT RATHER BOISTEROUS.

ONE OF THE USHERS FINALLY WALKED UP TO HIM & TOLD HIM HE NEEDED TO SETTLE DOWN.

THE MAN SAID, “*BUT I’VE GOT THE HOLY SPIRIT!*”

THE USHER SAID, “*WELL YOU DIDN’T GET IT HERE – SIT DOWN & BE QUIET!*”

THERE IS SAD TRUTH IN THAT STORY, ISN’T THERE?

WE AREN’T CALLED THE “*FROZEN CHOSEN*” WITHOUT JUST CAUSE.

NOW I’M NOT SUGGESTING THAT WE START HOOPING & HOLLERING IN WORSHIP – NOT ON THE OUTSIDE, THOUGH THERE’S CERTAINLY NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT.

BUT HOW MANY OF US AREN’T EVEN HOOPING & HOLLERING ON THE *INSIDE*?

LUKE IS CHALLENGING US TO BURN WITH A PASSION FOR WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS DOING TODAY – NOT 2,000 YEARS AGO.

HE TELLS US ABOUT THE FLAMES OF FIRE FOR A REASON.

AND I THINK HE TELLS US ABOUT THE UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE FOR A REASON AS WELL.

I THINK THERE'S AN IMPORTANT LESSON TO BE LEARNED HERE FOR OUR DAY.

IT'S A LESSON FOR THE CHURCH.

IT'S A LESSON FOR OUR FAMILIES.

IT'S A LESSON FOR OUR NATION.

IT'S A LESSON FOR THE WORLD.

WHAT IF WE SAW IN THIS STORY ABOUT UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER'S LANGUAGE A PARABLE ABOUT UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER'S VIEWPOINTS?

ARE WE REALLY WILLING TO LISTEN TO SOMEONE WHO HAS AN OPINION ABOUT SOMETHING THAT DIFFERS FROM OUR OWN?

I READ A FASCINATING STORY RECENTLY ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAD EDITED A BOOK ABOUT A VERY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE.

HE SOUGHT CONTRIBUTORS WHO HAD WIDELY-DIFFERING OPINIONS ON THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE.

THERE WAS ONE CONTRIBUTOR WHO HAD AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE IN WRITING HIS ARTICLE.

IN THE BOOK, HE ADVOCATES ONE POSITION, BUT IN THE EXPERIENCE OF HIS WRITING, HE MET PEOPLE WHO THOUGHT DIFFERENTLY THAN HE DID.

HE FOUND HIMSELF RECONSIDERING HIS ORIGINAL CONVICTIONS & EVENTUALLY MOVED IN ENTIRELY NEW DIRECTIONS.

HE NOW GIVES PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS WITH CONCLUSIONS THAT ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE HE MADE IN THE BOOK.

HE'S TRYING TO HEAR & UNDERSTAND THOSE OTHER LANGUAGES THAT ARE BEING SPOKEN & HE'S ALLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT TO MOVE HIM IN NEW DIRECTIONS.

WHAT'S EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE, THOUGH, IS THAT HE HASN'T CHOSEN TO ABANDON THE "LANGUAGE" HE PREVIOUS SPOKE.

HE CONTINUES TO LISTEN TO OTHERS' CONVICTIONS & BELIEFS.

HE EVEN ATTENDS SETTINGS WHERE HIS NOW-ABANDONED CONVICTIONS ARE PRESENTED BY OTHERS IN AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND & BENEFIT FROM WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY.

I WONDER HOW MANY OF US ARE WILLING TO ALLOW THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GRAB HOLD OF US ENOUGH THAT WE CAN HEAR THE LANGUAGE SPOKEN BY THOSE WHO HAVE DIFFERING POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT ANYTHING FROM SPORTS ALLEGIANCES TO POLITICS TO CHILD-REARING TO THEOLOGY.

LUKE, IN TELLING THE STORY OF PENTECOST, IS CHALLENGING US TO HEAR & UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGES THAT ARE BEING SPOKEN ALL AROUND US EVERY DAY.

HE'S CHALLENGING US TO BE ON FIRE WITH A PASSION FOR THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST –  
BELIEVING THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS STILL AT WORK TODAY.

WE MAY NOT UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED ON THE DAY OF THE FIRST PENTECOST, BUT IT  
DOESN'T MATTER.

WE DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND.

WE ALSO DON'T HAVE TO COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD IS STILL AT WORK  
TODAY – IN OUR WORLD & IN OUR LIVES.

SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT WORK CONTINUES “HERE, THERE & EVERYWHERE.” AMEN.

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