

Spiritual Connections

Acts 10: 44-48

Acts 2: 1-21

Clayton Schmit, Lutheran pastor and Professor of Preaching at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, tells this Pentecost story:

In my pastoral rounds, I often visited an elderly woman in a nursing home who was originally from Russia. She spoke virtually no English. I spoke absolutely no Russian. When I first visited her, I tried to indicate who I was. I showed her my Bible and my kit for [serving communion to] the homebound. I was moderately successful in this and she seemed to perceive that I was a priest or some such thing. While I could not converse with her in any usual sense, she seemed graciously to put up with my babbling in English. I could see by the warmth in her smile and the way she stroked my hand that she was grateful for my visits. Not much passed between us by way of shared information [however]. I could not let her know that I wished to hear her story and learn about her Orthodox faith. But [yet], there were moments of crystalline communication. These occurred when we entered the communion liturgy. Suddenly, all confusion and miscommunication fell away. We both entered the language of the church. At the Lord's Prayer we would recite together, English and Russian blending as if in perfect unison. Then, we shared the body and blood of Christ. No words were needed. There was a 50-year difference between our ages. During most of our lives, we would have been considered political enemies. Neither age, nor language, nor ideology divided us in those moments when the Holy Spirit drew us together in communion with one another and with Christ. (Schmit 47-8)

The Holy Spirit knows no human barriers.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, fifty days after Easter. We celebrate the old Jewish Festival of Weeks, fifty days after Passover, as the birthday of the church. In the first passage this morning, the traditional reading for this day

from the second chapter of Acts, we heard how the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles in tongues of fire. Every Jew, from every *nation under heaven*, heard them speaking in the native language of each, speaking of God's deeds and of Jesus Christ. They were astonished and amazed at the mystery of it all.

The second passage, also from Acts, is known as the Gentile Pentecost, and the description of it sounds very much like the first one. *...the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word...The circumcised believers...were astounded that the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God.* All people, even non-Jews, are welcome in the new covenant community that follows Jesus Christ.

Both passages from Acts tell us that the gospel story is a universal tale of redemption. The Holy Spirit has the capacity to reach beyond obstacles – of language, culture, geography, experience and tradition – to bring people to faith and to bring people of faith together.

The Holy Spirit does not recognize human barriers.

And so we have gathered here at the Peapack Reformed Church for worship on yet another Pentecost Sunday. And we, too, celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit among us, despite all our differences. And there are differences many differences.

You heard the Scripture read in a decidedly British accent. Jane Stanley and her family have moved here from England, but Jane has lived many different places in her life. With a little study, she could have read to you in Japanese. James has read to us in his tribal African Nuer language, and one Sunday he may read Scripture to us in Arabic. There are many

languages and cultures represented in our small congregation. But there is one Holy Spirit that illumines all the readings.

We have celebrated the Sacrament of Baptism for a very unique individual. Annie lives at the Matheny School. She is legally blind, is unable to walk, and she speaks with difficulty. Certainly, in language and culture, Annie is in a very different place from most of us. But her testimony was very moving. She may be disabled in body but Annie has been enabled by the Holy Spirit to seek after Jesus and to be baptized. Recall what Peter said in the second reading: “*Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*”

Finally, we will soon celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We will all come from the different places where our hearts are – from joy and happiness; from sadness and mourning; from anxiety and stress; from fear and worry; from age and youth; and from all our individual backgrounds and histories. **We will all come to this one table and the Holy Spirit will be present here to speak to each one of us as we have need.** For the mystery of the Holy Spirit transcends all our differences *with sighs too deep for words*. We come to the Lord’s Table knowing that *there is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

We are, each and every one, spiritually connected. The Holy Spirit knows no human barriers.

Schmit, Clayton J. “Released from Babel.” *Pulpit Resource* 34.2 (2006): 45-48.

Rev. Kathryn Henry
Peapack Reformed Church
Gladstone, NJ
June 4, 2006