

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, May 20, 2018 – Pentecost Sunday

So Now What Do We Do? (Psalm 104:24-34 & Acts 2:1-21)



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 dream dreams.
(Acts 2:17)

The story line of our passage/ text

Last week we noted how Luke begins his account of the early church – Jesus leaves, ascended into heaven – but God's prophetic presence and influence remains – in the form of the Holy Spirit – God's breath, the rush of God working in the world (like the wind) – seen in its effects – in what it helps people and things do – the essence of prophesy, according to Ellen F Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 2014) = one who is explicitly "sent to speak God's word in a situation where authority is disputed, and especially the authority to shape the life and destiny of the people of Israel." (38) – and remember, the people of Israel are sent to bless 'all flesh,' to pick up on Luke's quote from the prophet Joel – so, we are given a mission, sent to witness to God's authority in matters of life and destiny – and the invitation, quite simply, is to take responsibility for your participation in and contribution to the mission of God – in doing that, you will prophesy about the visions and dreams of the Commonwealth of God on earth – justice, kindness, and humility – but what enables us to do that?

Provocative Points to Ponder

- The simple answer is the Holy Spirit – but how do we understand that presence, that dynamic, the force? – we noted at Bible Study on Fri night that Presbyterians don't talk about the Spirit a lot – for John Calvin, the seminal thought leader of our branch of the Christian church, it was central – the Spirit makes all of God's intents and desires happen – stop and let that picture of the Spirit sink in – the Spirit is the loving energy that makes God's intent a reality – our worth and dignity lie in being sent to be involved in that mission – that what we get to do
- There is a violence in the Spirit's work – that's the image that Luke offers – "the rush of a violent wind" that fills the house – it sets each and everyone on fire for the mission of God – for what God is continuing to do in finishing the work that Jesus Christ and his followers started – to deepen and broaden that work
- Let's go back to Luke's account of Jesus' first sermon – because all of this relates directly and formatively to show Jesus showed up in the world – and his first sermon is his declaration, his manifest, on what we do as friends and followers of him – his text was from a prophet – from Isaiah 61:1-2a - *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent*

me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – that vision of the Lord's favour, it should be noted, is the reconciliation of "all flesh" to their original partnership with God

- At Pentecost, God's passes the torch, from Jesus to his followers in all generations and all places in this good earth – but that image misses some of the point – because God continues to run, not only with, but in, those who take that torch, who are enflamed with that mission of love for all the earth and the peoples of the earth – that's the message that moved us so deeply in Michael Curry's sermon at the royal wedding yesterday – in a world where fear, hatred, derision, and division claim the ultimate authority, God disrupts that sinfulness with the calming rush of his prophetic love that is poured out on all people – an inspiring paradox – does violence to violence
- So, now we become prophets – sent into the world this week to speak God's word of love into all our circles of influence in ways that challenge the authority of the arrogant, the callous, the hateful, the greedy, the oppressors with visions and dreams of a better way of living together – sent into the world to embody that way, as the continuation of Jesus Christ's incarnation -

Your Notes

Prayers of Thanks – for the privilege of joining you mission in the world – for your constant pestering and provoking to take up that mission of love in the world – for your mercy and forgiveness as we fumble through our responses to your grace – for the ways you teach us through that fumbling and make our efforts right for those you love - (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Help – for insight and strength in the face of partisan violence that divides and destroys – pray especially that you will bring clarity and compassion about your purposes in the complex tornadoes of hatred and violence that consume the Middle East these days - (silence to consider this)

Prayers for Awe – at your patience in working out your intent at Pentecost, that all flesh should enjoy the blessings of your Spirit as it shapes their companionship with you in mission - (silence to consider this)