

The Day of Pentecost

Year B

May 31, 2009

Each and every Pentecost Sunday serves as a “proclamation” of transition and new beginnings. It is the Church’s way of shifting its focus from the pain and joy that is the miraculous Season of Easter into the more “ordinary time” that is Jesus’ continuing work in our world. It is a transition from the “holiness” of death and resurrection into our “new lives” of discipleship and servanthood. This Sunday, in addition to this annual transition, we have the added joy of a baptism and at least the informal arrival of Summer. (In just a few moments) We will be welcoming Ryan Cochran (at the 10:30 service) as our newest member; and with the conclusion of another successful school year we are moving, hopefully, into the “lazier, hazier days of Summer.”

But before we crank up the excitement of the baptism or kickback into the Summer “mode”, let’s spend a few minutes considering this “transition” from Easter into Pentecost. Last Sunday afternoon I had a bit of a current day version of what the people of Jerusalem experienced on that first Day of Pentecost. The setting was a “town meeting” at St. Michael’s, in La Marque. The meeting was part of a series of meetings around the diocese that is intended to give our new bishop, Andy Doyle, a chance to “sit down” and listen to average folks like us talk about how we think the Diocese of Texas can best pursue its mission. In terms of structure the conversations were to be a continuation of the Diocesan *Visioning* process that began a year or so ago.

There were 75 to 80 people there and Bsp. Doyle began by telling us “his story.” I had not heard it before and thought it gave good insight into our new leader. Then we broke up into five groups that were to discuss the five foci of this diocese’s mission. To refresh your memories we are striving to be *One Church*, Youthful, Multicultural, Servants and Spiritually Forming and Growing. We were on our own to choose which group we wanted to sit in on and I chose Growing Spiritually. For me, *being* a Christian and *living* a life that reflects the life of Jesus **begins** (and ends, for that matter) as an extension of our *relationship* with the *Holy*. Trying to *do* what Jesus calls us to do, without being transformed and empowered by Him - from my observations – invariably falls short of the mark.

We end up frustrated and, eventually, disillusioned; and, maybe more importantly, whatever we are trying to do does not get done all that God has to offer. And so here I was - somewhat loaded for bear - gathered with 20 fellow Episcopalians, ready to talk about how we could best pursue the growth of *spiritual formation*. What I encountered was 45 minutes of discussion about average Sunday attendance and what was going to happen if it didn’t increase. After about five minutes, I begin to realize that I wasn’t hearing what was being said. Like the folk in Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago I was hearing, what for me, was a babble of foreign tongues. I was thinking about growing in God’s influence on our lives and I was hearing “woe are we.”

To say that I was “put out” would be the mildest spin I can put on how I felt. My first thought was, “*Am I the only one here who understands what we’re suppose to be talking about? What has any of this got to do with the growth of spiritual formation?*” Once the meeting was over, I left and, for several days, grouched, to anyone who would listen, about the gathering.

Quite frankly, to tell you the truth, I'm still put out about it. I still think it was one more missed opportunity to stress the importance of our relationship with the Holy. And yet, as those skeptics in Jerusalem discovered – *They are filled with new wine* – as they discovered, God can speak to us in many tongues.

Which means that just maybe that two hour ordeal in La Marque last Sunday afternoon was actually God reminding me (and no doubt others) of what can happen when we get distracted from our relationship with the source of transition and empowerment. Friday I read a little story about a church in northern California that was founded by immigrants from Denmark, in the early 1900s. By the middle of the century only a handful of the original founders were still alive and an English liturgy had long since replaced the original Danish services. On their 50th Anniversary they invited a Danish pastor to celebrate with them and they decided to use their old liturgy.

The Sunday of the celebration fell on the Day of Pentecost and the entire service was in the Danish language. When the visiting pastor was asked how the service had gone, he chuckled and said, *“I don't think there were more than a half dozen people there who had any idea what was being said. They seemed to like the sound of the language, but other than that, the whole service was quite unintelligible to virtually everyone.”* Yet, then he added, *“Still, worship occurred in a powerful way for all. The Holy Spirit showed up as usual, turning confusion into confession and grace. It was a day in which each in their own way understood God's love for us and left that place empowered to do God's work in our world.”*

For me, that is a powerful example of the potential that exists to transform our confusion and frustration into God's work in this world. It is,

also, a powerful testimony to all that we do here, this morning and every time we gather. When we get what we do here *right* – and by that I mean, when we fully commit our hearts, our minds, and our souls to this moment and this gathering – there is no limit to what we can do **out there**. The power of the Holy Spirit to transform and empower us is infinite. The desire of God for our transformation and empowerment is eternal. The commitment of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, has transcended even death. Now, now brothers and sisters, it is our turn.