

5.23.2021 The Feast of Pentecost

In these United States we have Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, vaxxers and anti-vaxxers, people who support open borders and others who build border walls. We have “us” and we have “them,” and needless to say, lately these United States haven’t been feeling very united. Just about every day we encounter another example of a person or group of people who simply refuse to even try to find common ground with those who stand on the other side of an issue, people who choose anger instead of understanding, belligerence instead of respect, pride and arrogance instead of humility. We seem to have come to a place where the unity that comes from respectfully communicating with another person is often just too demanding. Now it’s easier to just cancel them.

This morning is the Feast of Pentecost, and all that we celebrate today sharply contrasts the division, the selfishness, and the misunderstanding we see in our culture. When you consider the passage we read from the book of Acts, which describes the miraculous way Jesus fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 14:26), what you find in that rushing mighty wind, those cloven tongues like fire, and the Apostles speaking in different languages to people who were gathered in Jerusalem from *every nation under heaven* (Acts 2:5), is the comfortable truth that on the Feast of Pentecost instead of division, we celebrate union with God, instead of selfishness, we celebrate communion with one another, and instead of misunderstanding, Pentecost is a celebration of the ability to hear and receive the Truth.

All that we celebrate today sharply contrasts the conflict and division we constantly encounter in our post-Christian culture, and there’s a story in the Old Testament that parallels our current situation and even exposes the root cause of this ancient problem we still face today. In the book of Genesis, we read the story of the tower of Babel. In that story people thought that, apart from God, by their own effort, they could build a tower that would reach up to heaven, a tower that would put them in a position where they would no longer have to rely on, or believe in, a distant God. These people arrogantly thought they’d evolved, and progressed to a point where they had the ability to take God’s place on the throne. They were deceived, in the same way

Adam and Eve were deceived, into believing that they could “*be like God*” (Genesis 3:5).

The temptation our first parents faced in the Garden is the temptation the people faced at Babel, and it’s the same temptation we still face today: The temptation to rebel, to be our own gods, to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, to foolishly believe that we can live in unity and love for one another, apart from God who is the source of unity and love. Whether it’s in Eden, Babel, or our own culture, the result of that kind of disobedience is always the same. When we separate ourselves from God, we end up separating ourselves from one another.

For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with one another, in the presence of God, but on the day they fell into sin and separated themselves from communion with Him, the battle of the sexes began. When God spoke to Eve about the consequences of sin, He said to her, “*You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you*” (Genesis 3:16 NLT). In other words, instead of Adam being a man who would always lovingly care, protect, and provide for his wife, Adam would now seek to rule over her, and instead of Eve being the equal and perfect counterpart to Adam, she would now desire to control him. When we separate ourselves from God, we end up separating ourselves from one another.

We see the same result in the story of the tower of Babel. People who at one point could work together and cooperate with one another, suddenly realized that they couldn’t even communicate with each other. In trying to take God’s place by building this manmade throne, they separated themselves from Him, and when they separated themselves from God, they separated themselves from each other.

These biblical accounts of Eden and Babel are our experience as well. The incredible progress we’ve made in science and technology has convinced many people that we don’t need God, because they’d say, apart from Him, by our own effort, we can create and build and achieve anything we can imagine. There’s a growing number of people who think we don’t need God, because now, we can “*be like God.*” Yes, that ancient lie is still being told today, many are falling for it, and we’re all living with the consequences. In

this world of 24 hour news, social media, and a cell phone in every hand, the number of possible ways to instantly communicate with each other continues to increase every day, and yet, our actual ability to communicate, to truly understand one another, seems to decrease every day.

Eden, Babel, our own experience that comes from living in a culture that is quickly moving away from God, these things all reveal the truth that when we separate ourselves from God, we end up separating ourselves from one another, and that fact reveals the miraculous importance of what happened on the Day of Pentecost, because on that day in a rushing mighty wind and with cloven tongues of fire, instead of separation from God, there was union with God, and through this intimate union with Him, people “*out of every nation under heaven*” (Acts 2:5) were united to one another, and they heard, in their own language, “*the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:11).

People *out of every nation under heaven*, united to one another. That sounds a lot like what America was meant to be, and when you think about all we considered today, what you find is the only way for us to be a people, united to one another, is to be one nation under God.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit, and where there was once division and misunderstanding, it was God’s gift of the Holy Spirit that brought unity and understanding. As we celebrate today may we remember that the same miraculous gift of God has been given to us - for the same purpose. We have been given this gift that we may live in union with God, that we may love one another, and that we may open our mouths and declare to people out of every nation under heaven *the wonderful works of God*.