

The Day of Pentecost  
May 31, 2009  
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## Unbinding the Gospel

Today is the Feast of Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostle and transformed them so significantly that they began a revolution that was to transform the world.

You may all wonder, why it is called Pentecost. The explanation is simple. The event of the “Coming of the Holy Spirit” took place 50 days after the Jewish Passover, on the Jewish feast of the Harvest Festival. Pentecost is the Greek word for 50<sup>th</sup>. Hence, we know it as Pentecost. We could just as easily call it “Spirit Day”, “Transformation Day” or “get out and talk about Jesus day.”

The English called it: “Whit Sunday” coming from the old English word, “Hwita” meaning “white.” Apparently, it was a popular day for Baptisms in the early church, when all the candidates wore white robes.

Can you imagine, on this day, kneeling in church, receiving the Holy Spirit by others ‘laying hands’ upon you and then going out into the world to convince 10 people that Christ, the Christ of your salvation, can make a significant difference in their lives?

We all recognize that as Evangelism, and we all know that we are destined to always fail at it, unless we have been transformed ourselves and we are convinced of the significant difference that Jesus has made in our lives.

Evangelism, the word, comes from the Greek evangelium, “Good News: -to tell or proclaim the Good News.” Evangelium, the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is why we are all here. What the Apostles and disciples do on Pentecost Sunday is Evangelism. They go out and proclaim the good News. We cannot call ourselves “Christians” without it. That is our ministry, to tell Christ’s story. Everything else pales in comparison to that one mission. If we believe that we will be saved because we come to church, we are mistaken. Christ never says go to a church, go to a synagogue. He does say: “Proclaim my Gospel. Go tell what you have seen and heard. The blind sees, the lame walk, the leper is cleansed, the demon has been cast out.”

To pass through the gates of heaven, Evangelium has to be stamped upon your soul. “It states, that I have so let Jesus’ Gospel teaching infiltrate my being that it effects all that I do and my whole way of seeing the world.”

There are many ways of proclaiming the Gospel. In 1942 six students at the University of Munich met secretly in the basement of a Lutheran church. They were aged from 18 to 23. They were boys and girls and they were all German. They called themselves “the white rose,” and they were determined to stand up to Nazism and its evil values. Although they were Protestant, Catholic and even Orthodox Christians, this

group of friends decided with their Professor, Kurt Huber that they would do all in their power to oppose Hitler and Nazism.

They published from their secret basement six leaflets in a nine month period and distributed them across Germany. They believed that they had to do it. Their Christianity and the Gospel called for them to stand up to the evil they saw all around them on a daily basis. They knew that eventually they would be caught, but they did it anyway.

On February 22, 1943, Hans and Sophie Scholl, brother and sister and Christopher Probst, were caught, accused of spreading anti-Nazi propaganda and condemned to death. Alexander Schmorell, Will Grof, and Huber followed and died by hanging.

The leaflets they circulated in German cities were signed with a white rose. In 2005 in Bonn, Germany, the six were recognized and honored for the first time in history. Leading the testimony to them Monsignor Helmut Mol said:

“These boys and girl fought to defend the dignity of man in the face of a great evil. They could not let their Jesus lie in the pages of a dusty bible, but insisted on presenting him and all he means to a German people. With their white rose of valor they have rested hidden in the recesses of the German mind, history and story. Yet, they are martyrs too, for they gave their lives for what they believed. They are evangelists too, because they stepped out to proclaim their Christ despite the danger. And on a lonely gallows, they paid the ultimate price like sacrificial lambs for the lost conscience of German youth.”

Despite, the beauty and courage of that story, too often Episcopalians would prefer to face danger of any kind than to step out of the door of their church and tell anyone their story.

And that is what Evangelism is all about, telling others your story and being unafraid that God and Christ in particular, have played such a part in it.

Nancy Reagan tells of her first encounter with Ronald Reagan in 1949 by saying that what attracted her initially to her future husband was that he was a story teller. His stories had a wide range, and were not always about himself. He rarely had a bad thing to say about anybody, but saw the good in most people. What set Ronald apart from others, she said, was that he was honest. “What you see is what you get.” And he was an eternal optimism.

Optimism and telling the story are what Pentecost is all about. The Apostles and disciples are in hiding. They are afraid. The coming of the Spirit is a transforming experience that gives them courage and optimism and they go out to tell their story.

We are all afraid from time to time. We fear what is the shadows. We fear the unknown and yet none of it is necessary. Jesus seems to know this about his followers because he continually greets them with the words: “Be not afraid.” “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

In the 1960's we used to say "hey, that sends me, man." Where exactly it sends you, no one seems to know. But the Gospel has to send us. It has to send us out. Bishop Paul is fond of saying: "If you want to grow your church open your doors, go out into the community"

Jesus is telling us the same thing. "Do not be afraid, I am with you. Go forth, proclaim my Gospel. Tell your story."

Today in the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the Spirit of Truth. No one owns the Spirit of truth. He is there for the asking. He is there for each one of us. For when we do step out. When we speak of Jesus or minister in his name; we truly do not need to be afraid because the spirit of Christ is with us and the words we need he gives us.

"Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will open."

Only fear will stop us asking for help, only fear will forbid us from seeking or finding one more person who needs this church and its ministry; only fear will prevent us knocking on the door of other people's hearts and asking them do you want help? Do you want to wake up in the morning and know you are not alone, you are not afraid, that God has a place in your life and it is going to be a good day.

When is the last time you invited someone to church? Do you know that the most common question asked on any Friday in the year is "What are you doing for the weekend?"

Is your answer, "not much." Or "I am joining Linda, Janine, Bonnie, Al, Frank and a lot of my other friends in church, for worship, praise, fellowship and a real boost for the week. Why don't you come along? We could use a god tenor or soprano, and the food is good. It will be lots of fun."

Pentecost commits us to unbind the Gospel in people lives. We can only do that when that same Gospel is big in our life.

This week read the Gospel. Tell a friend and you will be an Evangelist and Jesus will be a big part of your story.

Amen+