

“Now What?”

Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17

The Day of Pentecost, May 19, 2013

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor

I’ve asked each of these saints to bring a word from God to you:

Lexy Winkleman – Spanish Carol Galloway – French

Cathy Cono – Italian Stacey Riccardi – American Sign Language

Now what?!? Oh, you’d like a translation? Let me first thank
[here acknowledge speakers and their languages]

Some of you may know they said *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* It is Peter’s preaching, inspired by the Holy Spirit, witnessing to God’s power to save.

I’ve invited these speakers in imitation of the first Pentecost. Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, tell us that the disciples were all gathered in Jerusalem to observe Pentecost, the feast that follows 50 days after Passover. The city was alive with animals and humans, worship services, harvest festivals and, most of all, the voices of religious pilgrims from all over the known world. Each spoke in their native tongue: an ordinary day in a cosmopolitan city.

Then, suddenly, something strange and wonderful happened. The Holy Spirit came *“like the rush of a mighty wind, appearing like tongues of fire.”* The disciples were inspired—which means, literally, “God-breathed”—to begin proclaiming the mighty deeds of God. That they did so in their own language was nothing unusual. That they understood others speaking a language different from their own was truly extraordinary.

To me, that’s the miracle: that these diverse peoples understood one another. The text conveys unity in the midst of diversity, an impulse of *e pluribus unum* (“one out of many”) long before it became a description of our American experiment or a value, as we will remember next weekend, that hundreds of thousands of Americans have given their

lives to secure. The gift of the coming of the Holy Spirit was power, the power Jesus promised, the electric kind of power that comes when differences, obvious and subtle, become a vehicle by which we affirm our greater unity.

Let me sharpen this, for there is a temptation for some of us to say, “Let’s not focus on our differences but our similarities” or even “It’s not our differences that are important, it’s our similarities.” That may be an opinion, but it is not the Biblical message before us today. Otherwise, why would Luke have gone to all the trouble he did to name all the groups and nationalities he did? Not just to bedevil those in the church trying to pronounce these places! Rather, because their uniqueness and difference was important. God created our differences. God created the wonderful diversity of humanity as a rich gift to the world.

Like any gift, it can be used or abused. In the wake of the Boston bombings our sensitivities are heightened. Some see those who are different as suspect. “Balkanization,” that process of cultural rivalry and conflict so associated with that part of the world that it has taken its name, does not only happen in the Balkans. Part of what makes Christians different is the demand God places on each of us to understand that humankind is a tapestry. Each thread is unique, different, worthy. Woven together, these unique threads create a thing of marvelous beauty. Missing any is to diminish the whole.

This brings us to our confirmands, their commitment today, and its impact on us all. They, and those confirmed last week, worked hard. They mastered memory work and attended classes and listened to corny jokes and participated in Christian service. And now, in the spirit of Pentecost, they will be asked, among other questions “*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races?*” They will answer, “I will.”

But now what? What happens next? All this is only a means to an end: being prepared to be disciples of Jesus Christ. And that end is never finished! Any graduate of “Disciple” Bible Study will tell you that. It’s subtitle, “Making Disciples through Bible Study” is a life-long enterprise. That good news—I daresay, the GREAT news!—of today’s scripture is that it is not all on us. The action of God’s Holy Spirit works on us—sometimes when we’re ready, sometimes when we’re not—and so what is required is calling on the name of the Lord—believing, trusting, having faith in God—to be saved.

I said their confirmation impacts us all, and so it does. For what is required of us is to be a Pentecost community in every sense:

- A community where we are inspired by the breath of God
- A community where we celebrate the richness of our humanity
- A community where we truly understand each other speaking
- A community where people believe in the living Lord
- A community where nothing is impossible
- A community where we build up one another in love
- A community where there are no barriers to Jesus.

Remember last year when we had such problems in Wesley Center that we had to close it down due to a leak in the roof. I know: we’d rather forget. George R. Sinclair, Jr. tells (1) the story of the church in Russia with a hole in its roof. But this was not a small hole, not a leak, but a hole big enough to put a person through. The church was built in the 15th century at a time when many people were sick. When the church was finished, ramps were built leading up to wide doors so that, if needed, the sick could be carried in.

That’s when the people of Kerajestan left the hole in their roof. They wanted a reminder of the story in the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 2, of the four friends who brought the paralytic person to Jesus. The church in Kerajestan made sure there were no barriers to Jesus. The church built a lasting testimony to the faith of friends.

(1) The Faith of Friends, February 23, 2003, Government Street Presbyterian Church, Mobile, Alabama

Touched by the Spirit, we live the vision of Jesus: loving all, friends and enemies; celebrating our uniqueness; working toward understanding through appreciating our neighbors; gifts; hearing in one another the witness of a wonderful, powerful, life-giving God. Now what? The wonderful future God has in store for us all. Amen.