

## **ACTS 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, Jesus' followers were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Awed and astonished, they asked "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia; Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we heard them speaking about God's deeds of power. All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed

them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*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 prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

## **THAT’S THE SPIRIT!**

### **Acts 2:1-21**

“I was absolutely blown away!” Isn’t that the expression we use when we describe a stunning experience that leaves us in amazement? According to Luke, the events surrounding the festival of Pentecost following Jesus’s resurrection got everybody’s attention. God knows how

to do that! Listen again to the verbs Luke uses to capture the celebrants' emotions: ***bewildered, awed, astonished, amazed, perplexed***. Their brains were addled having no frame of reference in which to place the incident they were experiencing. And some onlookers concluded it resulted from the effects of high-octane new wine consumed in the early hours of the morning. A bunch of drunks, huh?

But for those who were actively receiving the Spirit, the experience was inexplicable. How could they comprehend the words of those who were witnessing to God's powerful acts in languages they did not understand? There was no explanation for this. And collectively they were looking at each other and justifiably wondering, *What does this mean?*

So here we are two millennia later and that same question begs for an answer. What indeed does Pentecost mean for the twenty-first century world? How do we understand it in the context of the current socio-political dynamics operative among the peoples of the world in our own time? Doesn't it seem as if the divisions between us are growing wider rather than narrower? Hate groups are multiplying like nests of rats; immigrants are flooding our border as they flee from their homelands which are ruled by drug cartels, steeped in violence and poverty; mass shootings

grab the headlines on our news broadcasts nearly every day. And then there was another outbreak of the seemingly endless war between Israel and Hamas. I could go on and on, but isn't this small sampling of our adversity symptomatic of a deeply troubled teeny corner in God's creation? How should we interpret the message of Pentecost in the context of this messy world we live in?

Let's return for a moment to the narrative of the festival. What exactly was so *bewildering*, *amazing*, *astonishing* and *perplexing*? It was the tongues of fire, the rushing wind and people both conversing in and understanding languages not their own. But could there be an ancillary reason beneath the surface? What about the fact that it was Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, and Libya as well as Romans, Jews and Arabs all in the same room and totally unified in their proclamation and mission?

Can you imagine all members of Congress or the United Nations unanimously and whole heartedly agreeing on any issue? The rifts between us and among us are just so great that it is unimaginable that they could be bridged under any circumstances.

A fractured world is not God's vision and separation is not God's

message to the world on Pentecost. God's purpose in Pentecost was clearly to cultivate cooperation through the giving of the Spirit. By definition, to cultivate is to prepare something for use, to foster growth or to improve by labor and care. Was not God's message to us that though we are different in our cultures, our customs, our belief systems, our skin tones and our histories—all the characteristics we believe define us and segregate us from everyone else—that at the core we are rooted in the Spirit and that we are all members of a single race—the human race—and that we are therefore members of one family and that we can in fact live together in harmony, respecting the needs of one another without insisting everyone change to satisfy us; and that perhaps the single greatest thing we share in common is our need to be loved and accepted?

Why don't we comprehend this? When Edgar Mitchell, one of the Apollo 14 astronauts was returning to earth after walking on the moon, he had some time to look out the window and reflect upon what he was seeing—a beautiful blue and white planet in the midst of a great and shimmering cosmos. And later he wrote that “you develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to

grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles away and say, 'Look at that, you (S.O.B)!'"

So what was Pentecost if not a celebration of diversity? There was no attempt to pretend that everyone was the same. It was not about sameness. On the contrary, it was about the uniqueness of everyone, each person having not only the right, but the privilege to be exactly who they were. Jews could be Jews, Greeks could be Greeks, Arabs could be Arabs, Egyptians could be Egyptians, men could be men and women could be women. In the Old Testament, Joel exclaimed, *In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon **all** flesh...Then everyone (**everyone!**) who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* As poet Audre Lorde said, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences." That's the Spirit at work!

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