

Sermon preached by Tom Haynes
St. Elizabeth's, Culver
May 31, 2009
Pentecost Sunday – Year B

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

[Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104: 25-35,37 Acts 2:1-21](#)

[Romans 8:22-27](#)

[Romans 8:22-27 John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 Romans 8:22-27](#)

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be an acceptable offering in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

I am happy to be here this morning, and I told the Bishop I liked the idea of starting on Pentecost. This is the day the spirit descended on the apostles as we heard in the reading from Acts. St. Peter preaches, and there are 3000 converts. Many people call this the birthday of the Church, so let me wish everyone a happy birthday.

Many of you have been in churches where they will have the Acts reading done in different languages just for effect. Susan at St. Paul's in Mishawaka has her congregation doing this, and because she has a bunch of Notre Dame grad students in the congregation, they are reading the passage in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin as well as in a few modern languages too.

I have often thought that the way most churches do this reading with each reader doing a verse misses the point, because what was really going on was all the voices at once. To get the effect, I think churches should have everyone should do the entire reading in the Hebrew, Greek, etc., and they should all be talking at the same time.

In terms of effect, the closest thing I have ever come to it is maybe a train station in Switzerland or registration at the Academies. There are so many voices, and it seems as if there is at least someone speaking every language. There is an overload of information, and if you listen carefully, you hear things you can understand.

It is like the Tower of Babel in reverse. Instead of confusion and disorder due to all the voices, there are familiar words you can pick out and understand. They give you comfort because you understand them. Imagine if you will the voices and the commotion.

To provide some context for Pentecost, I want to look at the Ascension just for a second. This may very well have been Margie's subject for her last sermon because it would have worked so very well. Last Sunday was the Sunday after the Ascension, and Jesus tells the apostles in Acts 1 to wait and pray. He tells them the Holy Spirit will give them the tools to do their work. I suspect this is where some of you have been since finding out you would be losing Margie. There is some waiting and praying. Today is the day you find out if I can preach a sermon for example.

The waiting and praying business is over on Pentecost, and God provides the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost. The disciples have power and are witnesses in Judea, Jerusalem, Samaria and all the world. Essentially that is the first takeaway for us today. We have gifts of the Holy Spirit, and God has given us work to do.

Depending on which version of the of the Ascension you read, it is associated with the Great Commission. I'll read you the version in Matthew 28.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

The Great Commission is a cornerstone of the Christian tradition and practice. We are missionaries, and we are evangelists. We teach and baptize. I think sometimes we forget the Great Commission and get distracted by the details of liturgy or management. It is easier to get distracted in a large church I think than it is at St. Elizabeth's. We are a mission church, and that makes us missionaries. Even the diocese calls us a mission, and I want us to own that label with pride. We are taking the Gospel into a secular world.

The problem of course is what to do with all this. Some people think that the Great Commission means they are supposed to knock on doors and ask people about their personal relationship with Jesus. For the record, I am not planning to start a door to door campaign in the Culver area, so you can breathe a sigh of relief. So we are not starting there. Where do we start then?

The answer here is the same answer you give people in math tutoring or spiritual direction or marriage counseling. You start where you are. You identify a goal and you work toward it. It is a step by step process.

So the first step is figuring out what our goals are. In the vestry meeting Wednesday, I asked the vestry members a couple of questions. I asked them what was important to them at St. Elizabeth's, and I asked them what they would like to accomplish. Because I don't want to seem too simple in my approach, I used fancier words at the vestry meeting, but I suspect it was pretty transparent. Where are we headed? What do you have the heart for?

I have some ideas, but for the time being, I want you to think about Pentecost again. I want you to imagine that bustle and commotion, and I want you to think of the relief when you hear words that make sense. These are words in your own language, and they don't require a middleman to interpret and provide spin.

The second takeaway for you today is that we have to listen. I have to listen to the vestry, and I was in listening mode on Wednesday. The vestry needs to listen to you as members of the congregation. All of us need to listen for Jesus in all this listening.

What is God's will for this community of Christians? What does the future hold for us as our spiritual journeys have us walking together for a while? I am not here to tell you the answers. I am here to listen and help us as a community to decide what God has placed us here to do.

Now I will go back to the first main point in what I have to say today. God gives us gifts for ministry, and we are called to act using those gifts. My second point is that we need to

listen for God and we need to listen to our brothers and sisters as we discern God's will for us.

I want to focus for a minute on what has to be the toughest part of what I just said. Listening is hard and some people don't do it very well. God gives us gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that looks pretty passive. We are on the receiving end of a gift. The last piece though is the tough one. It is the action. We need to act on all that listening, and we need to use those gifts of the Holy Spirit.

My father used to say that preachers have sermons that fall into categories. There is the grace sermon, and the duty sermon. A common thread in my sermons is the idea of action. God as a rule does not call us to sit around and watch TV all day. He calls us to action, and this action all starts with Pentecost.

If anyone expected a six point plan today with marching orders, you are going to be disappointed. In our first reading today, the prophet Joel is quoted in Acts. He says

“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.”

The time now is the time to see visions or dream dreams (depending on your age of course). We need to listen and articulate goals. Quite literally we need a vision for this church, and Joel tells us it is time. Pentecost is here, and the Holy Spirit has arrived. It is time to get to work. The work for now is going to involve articulating a vision and setting some goals.

So we have waited and prayed. We are listening now for the voice that makes sense in all the commotion. We need to be committed to action.

Now if you are like me, I am a lot more comfortable with waiting, praying and listening than I am with committing myself to some unnamed action. I am going to leave you with two promises, and the first is the promise Jesus himself leaves the disciples in Matthew 28.

Jesus says “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” We are on a spiritual journey together, and we are looking for the map that we will follow for the next few years. In all this we walk with Jesus. I find that a great comfort, and sometimes I think we all need to remember that we are walking with Jesus.

The second promise is found in the Romans reading. What if we are worried that we are not up to the actions God has called us to? The Scripture tells us that “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Of course we are weak and sometimes we fear we are not the equal of the tasks ahead. We walk with Jesus though, and the Holy Spirit helps us.

So come Holy Spirit!

I thank God for each of you, and I am praying for discerning hearts as we listen.

*I have said these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*