

Newsletter Reflections for June

As I write this reflection I am contemplating the Scriptures we have had before us recently. They have been descriptions of the period immediately after the resurrection. So many times we spend Lent contemplating the cross and our need for repentance but once we get to Easter; once we view the empty cave we see the resurrection event itself as the end point. Essentially go back to thinking of “ordinary” things. Yet within the sanctuary the liturgical color is not the green of ordinal time, but it remains white. For seven more Sundays we are in the “Sundays of Easter.” During these Sundays we revisit the disciples doubt, their misunderstandings about what Jesus came to do, and we wait with the disciples for the coming of the promised guide—the Holy Spirit. We are told that Jesus spends 40 more days with them explaining things, trying to clear up their misunderstandings about what it means to be a member of the kingdom of God. Jesus ascends into heaven and ten days later the book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit arrives with the sound like the rush of a violent wind. Not only that, divided tongues as of fire appeared among them and a tongue rested upon each of them. (Acts 2:1-3). This wind and fire image denotes the arrival of the Holy Spirit which fills them and gives them the ability to speak in other languages. There are religious communities which understand this “speaking in tongues” as a gift which only a few can interpret. I don’t think that is what the passage is telling us. It is important for us to look at the context of this gift and how it was used by the disciples. They were empowered to leave the room where they had been gathering in fear and go out into the streets of Jerusalem where again crowds of festival goers from “every nation under heaven” gathered. Not only did they go out but they began witnessing to that crowd about “God’s deeds of power”. The members of that crowd were from diverse ethnic groups with different native languages yet the record shows that what they heard from the disciples was in their own language. The “speaking in tongues” gift they were given was so that the message about God’s deeds of power could be communicated widely. It was not a gift that was to be a source of pride, nor one which would separate the disciples from others as a favored group. These “Galileans” who were chosen from among fishermen and others probably spoke only Aramaic, the native language of the Jewish people after their return from the Babylonian exile. So for the message—the good news—to be heard by others outside their heritage—they were given the gift to speak so many could understand them. However you understand this particular gift, it is clear that Pentecost was a momentous, earth shaking, turn your life upside down event for these men. From that point onward their behavior changed drastically and the church of Christ was begun. With the beginning of June we celebrate Pentecost within the church today. We recount the events from Scripture about the experiences of those first disciples. Today, we often speak of the movement of the Holy Spirit yet how often as individuals do we really look for that type of movement of the Holy Spirit? The entire book of Acts which is misnamed the Acts of the Apostles is full of these types of movements—Acts of the Holy Spirit which upend everything the disciples thought. Peter, who denied Christ, speaks to the crowd and then testifies before the Jewish Council about the risen Lord. Although he has trouble with the concept, he learns that the Holy Spirit will come to Gentiles. As with the Pentecost celebration we leave behind the Sundays of Easter, let us reflect on the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit which serves as our guide can empower us. The Holy Spirit’s movement within will uproot our comfortable lives, our accustomed way of looking at the world as it leads us in the footsteps of Jesus who crossed boundaries and calls us to follow. We are called to be disciples of Christ, and as such we are God’s covenant people

whom God declared to be holy. This is not something that we can do on our own, but through the power of the Holy Spirit which comes to dwell within as our guide. Attached to this reflection is a poem which speaks to how we are called to be holy through the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Libby

God's Holy People

By Ann Weems from Searching for Shalom

Here we are, you and I,
called to be God's Holy People.
You say you're not the holy type,
but I'm not talking about holier-than-thou.
I'm not talking about religious ritual,
and the last thing I mean is self-righteousness!

Jesus chastised the self-righteous,
the ones who spent their days during the religious thing
the ones who spent so much time in religious ritual
that they didn't have time for tenderheartedness.

I'm not talking about them;
I'm talking about us.
I'm talking about paying attention
to the things Jesus taught people,
ordinary people, people like you, people like me
Look at the disciples: ordinary people
called to follow,
called to be God's Holy People,
called to live in this world with tender hearts.
Live holy lives. . . impossible?
Is anything impossible to God?
That old woman Sarah thought it impossible
to have a child . . .
The lepers thought it impossible
to be healed . . .
The disciples thought it impossible
to feed five thousand with two loaves and
five fishes . . .
Mary and Martha thought it impossible
that their brother Lazarus was alive. . .
The lame thought it impossible to walk . . .

The blind thought it impossible to see. . .

Here we are, ordinary people,
called to be the Holy People of God.
If you have eyes to see and ears to hear,
see and hear God's holiness in your life.