*Whitsunday(2023)*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**:

*“I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you.”* Jn.14:18

Today is Whitsunday, officially Pentecost, or the 50th day of Easter, if one includes Easter day itself. "Whitsunday" can be traced to one of two meanings. It may come from the ancient practice that those who had entered the church through Baptism at the Easter vigil put on their white garments for one last time, on this the seventh Sunday after Easter. It also can be traced by scholars to Medieval English where “wit” was the term for **wisdom** which of course is what the imparting of the Holy Spirit is all about. (It came to mean "funny" later.)

The ancient Jews had a festival of Pentecost, and we heard about the disciples getting ready to celebrate it in our Epistle from the beginning of the *Book of Acts*. At that time the first fruits of the year were offered to the Lord. The material offerings were lambs, goats, and loaves of bread. The people knew that Yahweh had no actual need of these offerings. Rather they were tokens of gratitude for all His Blessings AND a sign of obedience since the offering was commanded in the 23rd chapter of *Leviticus*. .

It was in this setting that the Apostles had settled when they heard the loud rush of wind, probably akin to the onset of a Chinook. Cloven tongues of fire were seen over their heads and they began to speak in ecstasy human languages which they had not learned.

The descent of the Holy Spirit that Pentecost is only recounted in the *Book of Acts*, by St. Luke. I pointed out last week that except for a very brief mention of Jesus' Ascension in the *Gospel of Mark* that St. Luke is the source of the details about that event as well.

This at first seems arresting given that the *Gospel of St. John* is universally regarded as the last of the NT books that was written when he was probably in his nineties. His Gospel ends with, well, with two endings. Chapter 20 concludes with the proclamation: "and many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book".

And then...chapter 21 begins. It starts with St. John's recollection about Jesus making breakfast by the seashore. It **ends** almost identically**:**  "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written". One only can wonder what these vast activities of Jesus were.

Most scholars believe St. John made this, last, last chapter as an addendum at a later date. Which raises the question why he then still made no mention of that first Pentecost? One can only surmise that St. Luke's account was such that John had nothing to add, which is in keeping with the tenor of his whole Gospel which relates stories no one else yet had written down**:**  Lazarus, and the Wedding at Cana to mention only a few.

Now because it was summer pilgrim crowds could swell Jerusalem to even greater numbers than at Passover since the weather always would have been fine by then. Thus, Jerusalem easily could have been full of pilgrims from all the distant parts of the Roman Empire, Parthians from Iraq, Medes from Iran, and Elamites from the Eastern shore of the Persian Gulf. These distant visitors were **amazed** at what they heard.

What these pilgrims were witnessing was a *reverse* Tower of Babel. We might recall that early in Genesis the Lord came down to see what mankind was building. When He saw they were striving to reach to heaven without any aid from Him--indeed, even in rebellion of God--He confused their tongues so they could no longer communicate.

That first Pentecost was the reverse. The Apostles started proclaiming the Good News in other tongues so all **could** understand. The Holy Spirit was enabling man to build the **church** to get back to heaven, but unlike before with the Tower: this time WITH God's aid. The disunity caused by sin was being replaced by the unity of the Spirit.

Now our Gospel passage, as was typical throughout Eastertide, comes from Jesus' farewell discourse at the Last Supper. Just before his Passion Jesus was informing his Apostles that he would be leaving them soon, not to be seen again. The Church uses this discourse in the Gospels leading up to Whitsunday as it gets ready to celebrate the establishment of the Church.

Certainly this news would not have given his followers any comfort at all, to know that their master, friend, and leader soon would be gone! They may have felt the horror of toddlers when they first hear the announcement: “mommy and daddy are not going be around tonight"! To combat natural human sadness or even depression Jesus promised that he, however, would not leave them without any source for comfort. He would send His Spirit to come to them.

All this begs the question, “why did Jesus leave in the first place?” Why not stick around and start directing his Apostles to victories over all the evils in the earth?! Would this not be faster and easier? With Jesus at the helm who could beat them!!

This of course was not the approach of or game plan for Jesus' life. He had come to earth as a man to **redeem** the world (to fix the painting he had created and the devil had hit with acid). Jesus earthly life and death had provided the means for all to be saved, if they would merely believe in him. Fostering belief meant “spreading the word”, which is what he now wanted his disciples to do.

Spreading the word, the Gospel or Good News, meant sending them out into a world where each would run into unique situations every single day. As long as Jesus was in His earthly body, he was constrained by his own human nature, and could not be at each of their sides 24/7 telling them precisely what to do at every single moment.

Wise parents know that their own children at some point must spread their wings and start thinking for themselves and not be told what to do every single second their whole lives, even though it means that they will make mistakes. If it were otherwise, children would never leave the house, never have their own lives, or even learn to walk. And as we all remember, learning to walk means going “BOOM!” more than once. ("Boomer" was your pastor's nickname when very young.)

Jesus needed his Apostles to start thinking on their feet and not wait, as young students do, for explicit, detailed instructions each step of the way. But, he still would be continually with each of them in their walk through life! His presence would be by and through the sending of His own Spirit, the Comforter, to guide them, to teach them in all things.

His Spirit, the Paraclete, would not be constrained by Jesus' bodily restrictions. When compared to soapbox preachers of yesteryear our modern technology such as radio, television, phone, email, ZOOM, and social media, affords us much of the same otherwise impossible ability to be with others with whom we are not physically present.

But, of course, when someone is dealing with precise directions from his boss he can be pretty sure what to do. How can one tell that any guidance or inspiration he perceives in a situation comes from the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Christ? After all, the devil, is still out there trying to trip us up.

Jesus gives us some clue on this last matter at the end of this Gospel lesson. He told his Apostles, “my peace I give to you”. His Spirit will bring you peace. While the devil likes to make us upset or anxious, Jesus wants us to be at peace. We may gulp at what we realize we have to do, but we find rest knowing that... at least it is right.

So, because Jesus wants all of us to help Him in his work, namely, spreading His Gospel, he physically **had** to leave us. Yet, we are not abandoned. We need only to pray for His guidance along our daily paths **and** then listen for His Spirit's, the Paraclete's guidance. If the advice is from the Lord above it actually will grant us peace.

Further, the Paraclete abides **in** us, not just **with** us as Jesus did. In life we may lose and arm or a leg. Those we know around us may stop being friends or leave us at death. But, as with our conscience, the Comforter, the Strengthener, the Advocate, remains ever with us....**inside** us... to guide us through our **earthly** life and away from Towers of Babel... into eternal life. AMEN.

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