

Pentecost 2009

Acts 2:1-:11 and John 15:26-:27, 16:12-:15

In our first reading today we heard about an unusual, almost bizarre display of God's power. In the account of Pentecost which we heard read we were told that as a result of the gifts of the Holy Spirit the disciples were able to speak in languages that they did not know. As a result the members of a crowd which had gathered for the Jewish religion festival of Pentecost were able to hear the disciples speaking in their own native languages.

This was a crowd which had come from throughout the known world, from dozens of nations and regions.

For all of them to be able to hear the Gospel proclaimed in their own language, and proclaimed by people who did not have the natural human ability to speak these languages, would have been more astounding than just about anything these people could have imagined or predicted.

But God didn't do this as some kind of stunt, this wasn't just a neat trick that he pulled off. There was a specific goal that God wanted to accomplish, and there were specific reasons that this goal was accomplished in the way that it was.

So the ability to speak in these languages was not something the disciples did just to show off, it accomplished a specific purpose. What was this purpose?

Well, the reading we heard was from the beginning of the 2nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, as we go further into this chapter we find out that the people who witnessed the disciples do this were amazed (Acts 2:12) and that their amazement made

them ready to listen when St. Peter got up to speak and to explain what was happening.
(Acts 2:14-:21)

St. Peter used this opportunity to speak about Jesus Christ, about his death and resurrection, and about Jesus' identity as the Messiah of Israel. (Acts 2:22-:36)

Given what they'd seen and what they had heard as St. Peter explained these events, those in the crowd decided they were willing to listen to what these people had to say.

We are told that after hearing the preaching of St. Peter "they were cut to the heart" and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what are we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Peter's response, in part, was as follows, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)

And then we're told that the result of this was "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day." (Acts 2:41)

So the result of the miracle of Pentecost, the miracle of the disciples being able to speak in languages they had never learned, was that 3,000 people, through faith and baptism, received the forgiveness of their sins and were welcomed into Christ's church.

Pentecost wasn't about anyone showing off, it wasn't about something flashy and dramatic being done for it's own sake, it was about God doing what was necessary to prepare people to open themselves to Jesus Christ, so that the salvation offered through his Gospel could be theirs.

God worked a miracle so that people would be moved to put their faith in Jesus Christ, and there was also a specific reason that God worked this miracle to get these people to place their faith in Christ.

Those who heard the preaching of St. Peter had come to Jerusalem from all over the known world. The list of their homelands that we hear means they had been gathered from as far as what would today be Turkey, Iraq, Libya, Italy, and elsewhere. (Acts 2:9-:10) At the time not only was the number of those who were committed followers of Christ very small, but these few were mostly concentrated in and around Jerusalem.

So through the 3,000 who were baptized that day not only did the Church grow dramatically in numbers, the fact that many of those baptized were going to return to their homelands meant that the foundation was laid for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.

And we are also told that some of those who were baptized were converts to Judaism. (Acts 2:11)

At that time Jewish identity was largely based on ethnicity, you were Jewish if you were born into a Jewish family, but it was possible to convert to Judaism. So some did so, the numbers were kept low by the strict demands of the Jewish faith, including the challenging fact that circumcision was required of male converts to Judaism, but to a limited extent the ethnic barriers between Jews and non-Jews were broken down as the result of these conversions.

So if we have those who were born into Judaism, and those who converted to Judaism, being baptized and received into the church, we see the disappearance of some

ethnic barriers which would have stood in the way of those who wished to enter the church.

At the time of Pentecost virtually all of those who had been won over by Christ's teaching were Jewish, but throughout the course of the Acts of the Apostles we see an ever expanding outreach to the Gentiles, the Gentiles being all those who were not ethnically Jewish.

Eventually the early church cast aside all barriers which separated those who were ethnically Jewish from those who were not, and this process of welcoming those of every race and nation into the church was furthered in a very real way at Pentecost.

So at Pentecost we see God doing something that was not just dramatic and flashy, but something very specific which was done to accomplish a very specific purpose.

The doors of the church were being opened further so that all people of all nations could be embraced by the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. The desire to see this happen was something that shaped the lives of the disciples and Apostles, the first Christians worked tirelessly to win anyone and everyone over to the cause of Christ, and this commitment to evangelization that was shown at Pentecost, is meant to be something that defines the life of every member of the church.

If we don't take this work seriously then we do not understand the love that Jesus Christ has shown for us, or the love that he has demanded that we show to others.

God miraculously aided the evangelistic work of the disciples at Pentecost, our efforts in this area probably won't take the same dramatic form as it did for them, but we are called upon to show the same absolute and complete dedication to this task, the task

of doing everything that we can to ensure that as many people as possible embrace the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.