

Sermon  
Pentecost 2024  
Acts 2:1-21

Acts Chapter 10 is seen by some people as one of the most dangerous chapters in the bible. It's in this chapter where Peter has a vision of a sheet full of both clean and unclean animals coming down from heaven and being told to "kill and eat." Peter, being a good Jew, declines because he's never eaten anything unclean. This happens three times, and each time, a voice says, "What God has made clean you must not call profane."

Later in the chapter Peter interprets this vision as basically meaning, "All means all, y'all." From here on out the gospel message of inclusion really gets rolling. There are, of course, bumps along the way. People have disagreements (see Peter and Paul, for instance), but there is no denying that it is God's will for all people to be part of the body. All means all, y'all.

This call for inclusivity, however, doesn't begin with Peter's vision. It doesn't even begin with his interpretation of that vision. It goes back much farther. I would argue it goes all the way back to Genesis 12 when God told Abraham, ". . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Regardless of where you trace it to, the fact of the matter is that God desires all people to be part of the body, hoping that all people will come within that loving embrace.

We also see God's desire to bring everyone back into the fold in today's reading from Acts. The twelve apostles were gathered together in one place when the Holy Spirit, with the force of a strong wind, suddenly fills the house. Divided tongues of fire appear, a tongue of fire resting on each of the apostles. Just like the burning bush that was not consumed revealed the presence of God, these tongues of fire resting on the apostles but not consuming them also revealed the presence of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. And then all of them began speaking in other languages as they were given the ability.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cappadocians, Libyans, Cretans, those from Pamphylia and Phrygia, Arabs, Egyptians, and Romans all heard them in their native tongue speaking of the glorious power of God. In this event we see God's desire to bring all people into the fold and within that loving embrace. Once again we are shown that all means all, y'all.

Even so, there are people who will doubt and detract from that message of inclusivity. In this case it's not the message per se that is attacked, it's the messengers. We see this all the time. When people want to discredit a good message, they attack the messenger by any means necessary to discredit, disrupt, and destroy. In today's story those who wanted to disrupt the message accused the apostles of being drunk.

Peter, using one of the best lines in all of Scripture, addresses the detractors and says, “Men of Judea, these are not drunk as you suppose, for it’s only 9:00 in the morning!”

Peter continues his rebuttal not by attacking his detractors, but by reinforcing the message of inclusivity from Scripture itself. I suppose he could have gone back to Genesis and Abraham’s encounter with God, but he instead chooses to quote from the prophet Joel. This is exactly what God said would happen: The Spirit of God would be poured out on *ALL* flesh. Sons and daughters will prophesy. Young men shall see visions and old men shall dream dreams. Both male and female slaves will receive God’s holy Spirit, and they will also prophesy. In short, men and women, boys and girls, young and old, slave and free, will all receive the Spirit of God. All means all, y’all.

It's one thing to hear these ancient biblical stories and play those scenes out in our heads as if we're watching some Cecil B. DeMille epic. But it's quite another to imagine them playing in the here and now. Looking at them in the here and now, there are two points I want to address.

The first is this whole thing about speaking in other languages, or speaking in tongues. There are some denominations who use that as a basis for whether or not someone really has been baptized by the Holy Spirit. I'm not saying it doesn't happen, but I am saying to take a closer look at this.

When the apostles spoke in languages the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, etc. could understand, they spoke in languages that could be understood. In other words, it's not about the ability to speak in other languages or tongues, it's about being heard. It's about meeting people where they are so that they can hear the good news of God in Christ that you proclaim.

That's one of the reasons I go to the bars – because meeting people where they are might allow them to hear the good news of the gospel message, which then might lead them to come and see what this is all about. I think this is preferable to requiring or expecting people to come here first before hearing anything about the gospel message. Speaking in tongues is nothing more than speaking so others can hear you.

The second point has to do with Peter's quote from Joel. Invariably someone will tell me, or I'll read something stating, that we're in the last days. Everything from disasters to wars to the wrong person getting elected to solar eclipses to lunar eclipses to almost anything else is cause for end-times paranoia. People have a fascination with the last days and end times. In the quote from Joel, one of the signifiers of the end times is that God's spirit will be poured out on everyone. Rather than being a time of disaster and despair,

this will apparently be a time of God's presence and the Spirit being given to all people – young and old, male and female, slave and free.

In the last days, *EVERYONE* will be gifted with God's presence and Spirit. The end times aren't a time for despair, but a time for rejoicing in this great gift. And to be quite honest, that scares some people.

The lessons of Pentecost are these:

- 1) We can all speak in tongues if we simply speak in ways that people can hear us; and
- 2) We need to be open and willing to see the inclusivity of God as a good thing.

In both of these, speaking in tongues and the last days, the message is this: all means all, y'all.

Amen.