

(Day of Pentecost)

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May 20, 2018
Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

The story of Pentecost actually begins with the disciples of Jesus once again gathered in one place, presumably in a room behind closed doors, unsure of their direction or purpose. Jesus, who had been crucified, dead, buried and risen again, has now ascended, leaving the disciples with the new commandment to live and love one another as he had shown and taught them.

They are short one disciple, with Judas' betrayal and very descriptive death in Chapter 1. Two possible candidate names are brought forward, "Joseph called Bar-Sab-bas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias." A vote is taken, and Matthias is chosen.

While they were still together in the room, suddenly we are told by Luke, there was a noise, like the rush of a violent wind filling the room! Tongues like fire danced around them, and they were filled with the Spirit, and they began to speak in different languages! And then, Luke tells us, they take to the streets of Jerusalem!

The streets of Jerusalem is where we found ourselves this past Tuesday, when in a highly volatile and ill advised move, the Trump Administration moved the U.S. Embassy from the internationally recognized modern day Capital of Israel, Tel Avi, to Jerusalem.

As I have mentioned before, Jerusalem, is the heart and soul of three major Abrahamic religions - Judaism (Jesus and the disciples all being Jews), Islam (which, contrary to what you may have heard, honors and worships Jesus), and Christianity (which follows the first century Palestinian Jew named Jesus). All three are born out of the seed of Abraham with either Sarah or Hagar as their mothers. As Abrahamic faiths, they all three worship the same God.

By whatever name we call God, it is still in the scared image of God that we as humans, regardless of our race, beliefs, or nationality, are created.

As I have said, and it is important for us to understand as followers of Jesus, God is not Christian, Jewish, Muslim. God is God. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "God has no religion."

Yes, God has no religion. Think about that. God doesn't, but we do.

Yesterday, preaching at the royal wedding, Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry said, "**We were made by a power of love. Our lives were meant and are meant to be lived in that love. That's why we are here. Ultimately the source of love is God himself. The source of all of our lives.**"

Our Creator God, creating still, has no religion, yes, but God does speak a language and that language isn't English! It is the universal language of Love.

As the writer of 1 John (4:16) says, "God is love and those who love, abide in God, and God abides in them." As the Beatles sang, "All you need is love." It is really all that simple, and yet, all that hard to live in love. (MDubs)

As humans, we have separated ourselves into different tribes, nationalities, religions, speaking different languages, arguing, fighting, and even killing those created like us by God, in the name of our own religion and beliefs.

Which brings us back to the streets of Jerusalem this past week. On Tuesday, May 15, 61 people, including an 8-month-old baby girl, who were created in God's sacred image, just like you and me, were shot and killed by people created in the same scared image of God. And the reason? Because of the different ways we worship the same God.

Here is something else to reflect on, not all Palestinians are Muslim. Some are Christian. Jesus, who was Jewish, was a first century Palestinian.

God, who has no religion, who speaks one language which is the language of Love, is also not defined by the borders or boundaries, walls and barriers we have established or built to define our territory or nations.

Which again brings us back to the streets of Jerusalem, the Holy City. All three of the major Abrahamic faiths lay claim to Jerusalem. The Jewish people see it as "their" Capital. So do the Palestinian people, who view East Jerusalem as their Capital.

And what about Christians view of Jerusalem? Is it our Capital city too? Not really, rather, Christians see it as a sacred Holy City, if not a prime tourist destination, that connects us with the streets and places where Jesus lived. However, there are some "Christians" known as "Christian Zionists" like John Hagee, founder of "Christians United for Israel" and Robert Jeffress, a controversial Southern Baptist preacher, both were invited to speak at the Embassy opening, who believe Jerusalem must become the "Capital" for a united Israel. They believe this not because they really care about peace or unity or Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel. Actually, both pastors have said some horrific things about Jews and Muslims. Hagee said that he believes Hitler was sent to "hunt and kill" Jews on God's behalf.

In their minds they believe these things because of some, and this is my word, "warped" interpretation of Revelation, the only way for Jesus to return is for Jerusalem to be the Capital. And once it is, Jesus will return, and to literal "Hell" with Jews and Muslims and Christians who don't believe what they believe.

Let the blood flow, and the killing begin, all in God's name!

Which brings us again, back to the streets of Jerusalem where so many people have been killed over the centuries.

Luke, who is the writer of Acts, knows something of this painful, bloody history of Jerusalem. It is why, in his account of Jesus' entry, he tells us that as he approached the city, Jesus wept over it, saying: **"If you, even you, had known this day what would bring you peace, but even now it is hid from your eyes."** (Luke 19:42-43)

Jerusalem had a reputation of stoning those prophets who crossed the religious and political borders and barriers constructed by humans. It had killed far to many who spoke God's language of Love, Jesus included.

Pentecost is not simply the birthday of the "Church", it is so much more. It is a spiritually charged, political, yes, I said political, movement that blows open the doors that people of all faiths and no faith, hide behind, leading us out into the streets of Jerusalem and onto East Main Street in Cambridge, and along Highway 12/18, and wherever people get their

kicks, be it Route 66 or a desert path leading from Mexico into the United States or across an ocean.

It is a spiritual movement that opens our mouths to speak the One True Language of God - Love, in the many, rich and diverse languages humans speak.

No matter how hard we try to contain God to any one belief system and religion or political party and national identity, the story of Pentecost reminds us that we cannot do so.

God cannot and will not abide by our human rules and laws, our human religions or belief systems, our geographical or political borders. God will not limit God's language of love to any one country or religion or political party. God is God. And God's language is Love. All human beings are the product of God's love. To hurt, shoot, bomb, or kill another is to do so to God too!

The Pentecost story reminds us that we hear God's language being spoken through the rich, diverse words uttered by humans around the world and sometimes when they are standing in a check out line with you here in America.

As for the Capital of God's Kingdom on earth? I for one, do not believe it is to be found in Jerusalem. It is, as Jesus said, inside of each and every human being. We are God's embassies and ambassadors on earth, honoring the Capital of God's Kingdom, which dwells within all people, despite our claims to the contrary.

As writer and theological scholar, Sean McDonagh says of Pentecost: **"The Holy Spirit is the source of all unity. All attraction, all bonding, all intimacy and communion follows from the Spirit. Each of these relationships is sacred to the Spirit, who inspires all fruitfulness and creativity, the signs of true bonding and intimacy. From the Spirit comes the great urge to heal what is broken, re-unite what is separated and recreate the face of the earth."** (Sean McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology*).

A mighty wind is still blowing, calling us to leave the safety and comfort of our known lives and venture out into the streets and into the world to proclaim this, God's good news, in every language, by speaking the One language - and that is the powerful, redemptive, reconciling and healing language of Love!