

## GOD AND OUR EXPECTATIONS

Pentecost Year B

Acts 2:1-21; Ps. 104:24-34,35b; Rom. 8:22-27; Jn. 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 Gladstone 20/05/2018

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Expectations. We all have them. We have expectations about lots of things. We have expectations about the world. We have expectations about how children should be raised. We have expectations about how people should behave—especially Christians—and perhaps some more realistic ones about how they *actually* behave, at times. We have expectations about church, about family, about work, about life in general. Some of our expectations are realistic and others not so much. Some of our expectations are realised and others not so much.

It's not a question of whether we have expectations or not, but what kinds of expectations we have. This is especially true when our expectations are about God and what God is doing in the world and in our lives. And gosh, there are a lot of *different* expectations about those things among Christians—probably even here within this congregation.

Those who were gathering at the temple in Jerusalem for the Pentecost celebration, as we see recorded by Luke in the book of Acts, would have brought all sorts of different expectations with them. For the average Jewish religious pilgrim, this was the contemporary version of the Jewish Feast of Weeks, a harvest celebration that originally commemorated God's blessing and provision. But increasingly, the festival was associated with the formation of the Jewish people as God's covenant people, about covenantal renewal, and correspondingly the giving of the Jewish law to the people—all of which were seen as additional signs of God's faithfulness and provision.

But there were also the Jewish believers of Jesus—the apostles and others—who not only had been followers of Jesus but were also both believers and witnesses to his resurrection. Jesus had instructed them “not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.” (Acts 1:4). The small group of now eleven apostles and a few women followers initially gathered in an upper room, most likely the same one where they had shared Jesus' last meal. But as the group expanded, it's unlikely that they continued to meet there.

On this important Jewish festival, it is likely that the “one place,” that Luke mentions, (2:1) where they gathered together was the temple in Jerusalem. They too had expectations: that the same God who had been at work in Jesus would fulfill the promises that God had given to His people.

So, these followers of Jesus, who were also faithful Jews, would naturally take part in those celebrations over God's provisions for his people.

The Apostles, so recently cowering in fear, are now gathered in prayer and hope. They are waiting on God...and God shows up—possibly not in any way they might have been expecting. God becomes manifest in and through these most unlikely prophets in a very dramatic way.

Imagine the Pentecost scene, if you will. The city of Jerusalem is teeming with tourists in town to offer the first fruits of the spring wheat harvest. Certainly there is still a bit of a buzz over this Jesus character who 50 days earlier was said to have risen from the dead after being crucified at the hands of Rome. His disciples, dutifully following the directions Jesus gave them, are waiting and praying for the Advocate to come and guide them in what is coming next...when all of a sudden, the room is filled with noise and light and heat and flame.

The disciples, about 120 of them, begin to speak in a cacophony of voices. To everyone's amazement, amidst all this noise, they are able to hear the testimony of God's deeds of power—presumably in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—in their own native language. Luke tells us that the crowds response was to be “amazed and perplexed.” The Greek literally says that they were “beside themselves” with amazement and “wholly at a loss” for what to make of what was happening right in front of them.

Interestingly, with all the expectations that come with those who gathered for the Pentecost scene described in Acts 2, Luke only dedicates four verses to describe the extraordinary scene that took place. With vivid imagery, he makes it clear that what happened that day was divine in origin, was consistent with what God had been doing within the story of Israel as God's people, and was missional in perspective.

Just as God breathed into the first human at creation, here at Pentecost the author describes God's creative work in the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit among this group of Jesus' followers—providing them what they would need to carry out God's mission as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Despite the initial confusion by some bystanders who characterized the believers' behaviour as a sign of public intoxication (in other words, they had been celebrating a bit too much and were now drunk) the author of the book of Acts depicts the believers' proclamation as bringing the Jewish people together, even though their wide-ranging

homelands suggest them to be representative of the Jewish Diaspora, the scattered Jewish people throughout the known world since their time in exile.

Many asked, "What does this mean?"

What does it mean that devout Jews from all over Europe, all in Jerusalem to take part in one of the less popular Jewish feasts, were given the privilege to hear a word about a subversive Rabbi who was put to death for claiming to be the Messiah? What was God doing in that moment?

Peter's speech that follows this initial event offers an explanation of what happened, both to the bystanders and to the readers of Acts.

Current readings of the Pentecost event in Acts 2 often bring with them expectations regarding the Spirit that are influenced by other scriptural texts. We see in other places where the role of the Spirit is described in ways that may be understood in more individualistic ways, as the Spirit offers guidance and instruction.

The apostle Paul writes about the importance of living according to the Spirit. When he states in his letter to the Romans, that, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Rom. 8:5-6)

In Acts 2, however, the focus is not so much on the Spirit's work within the individual but on the Spirit's enablement of the faithful people of God so that they may live as God's servants on behalf of others.

So, what does this mean? It means that it is God's deepest desire that the whole world be restored to right relationship with God through the saving power of Jesus Christ. It means that beginning in Jerusalem, with faithful Jews, the Good News of Jesus would spread to the whole world. It means that God has a plan for salvation history, and that no matter when we come to faith, we have a role to play in that plan. The Pentecost event *is* amazing and perplexing, but it is by design, for the sake of the whole world.

This passage reminds us that, at the heart of Pentecost, is what God was doing through the people of God for the sake of others.

We live in the Day of the Lord, and we wait for the Christ's return. We have been created, and we are being constantly recreated. We are already saved, but not yet delivered. We live in the middle ground, and on this birthday of the church there is still work to do.

Being saved isn't just about having an eternal mailing address. It isn't just about heaven and hell, it's also about living in the revelation of who Jesus Christ is for us. It's about living as Christians in the midst of a broken and hurting world—about letting the Holy Spirit fill us and unleash us for God's work. It's about not just *celebrating* The Church, but about *being* The Church.

We are saved, we are forgiven, but we are not yet free, not yet fully delivered. As Christians, on the way to the Promised Land, we live somewhere in the squishy middle, the grey area, the hurting and broken world. So, what do we do? We allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, to fill us, to use us—for we are all part of the Church.

We are the least, last, and lost, and we are welcomed. We are the unlikely prophets with a word to proclaim. We are not drunk (at least I hope we are not), we are instead filled with the Joy of the Spirit of God. And, like the Apostles will show us as we go deeper in Acts, we have work to do. We don't just get to celebrate The Church, we get to *be* The Church.

We have to be the Church. This is our holy task. Doing so celebrates, participates in, and anticipates God's great and final act of deliverance yet to come.

Come Lord Jesus Come! And may Christ find us busy with His work when He does.

To Christ our Saviour be all the glory, honour and praise. Amen.