

May 1, 2011 Narrative Lectionary, Acts 2:1-21
The Day of Pentecost and Affirmation of Baptism

Acts 1:8 (theme verse) – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *The Poisonwood Bible* (one of my favorite novels), the character, Rev. Price is with his family as missionaries in the Congo in the 1950s. He feels it’s his job to bring Jesus to the people, yet he fails to really get to know their culture and to understand their language. While preaching to them, he proclaims, “Jesus is bangala!” If he were using the correct tone and cadence of the word, he would be saying what he wanted to say, “Jesus is supreme.” Instead, not having taken the time to know the subtleties of the language, what he actually said was “Jesus is poisonwood,” which is the name of a local plant that’s horribly irritating. Language can be confusing and cause confusion. Some things get lost in translation.

I’m sure that David is learning that himself, as he arrives in the capitol of Cameroon. Some things just do not translate between cultures. Humor is different. There’s a different set of stories that becomes the history of a people. If you don’t realize it or try to force “what you know,” like the character Rev. Price in *The Poisonwood Bible*, you will fail miserably.

The group that I traveled with to Cameroon in November 2009 learned that several times when things got lost in translation and in confusion.

Example – Bishop Zellmer’s sermon – didn’t seem to be coming across through translation. At the end, they said of the translator, “he did his best.”

Here, on the day of Pentecost, we find something so different for those involved. All those people and all those languages, and yet, they can hear and understand what is being said.

If you’re a visual person, you might think that we’ve lost something in translation today -- **Bi-colored banners** – white and red – last week celebrated Easter and the resurrection of Jesus. What are we doing already celebrating Pentecost?

Narrative lectionary – we are moving into the stories of the book of Acts – a book of the Bible that is often neglected in our regular lectionary

Good timing b/c also affirmation of baptism (confirmation) for Michelle Flug

Brief background of Acts

Luke/Acts – a “2 volume work”

Luke set out to write a history – a series of speeches and stories in the book of Acts -- it also becomes a word for our time – an openness of the future despite being surrounded by risks and threats (Donald Juel, Luther Seminary)

Not all that strange, maybe, to jump right into the book of Acts one week after Easter b/c it is about showing how the resurrection works. (the “outworking of the resurrection message” Craig Koester, Luther Seminary); showing faith and how the spirit works in people’s lives

Meaning of Pentecost – Jewish festival; 1 of 3 major agricultural festivals, otherwise known as “the festival of weeks”; 50 days that separate it from Passover

Fulfillment of predictions of John the Baptist and Jesus

Reversal of the break-down of the tower of Babel

Easy to get caught up in the dramatic signs of violent wind, tongues of fire, the sound of everyone speaking

Appropriate – the coming of the Spirit – wind, blowing through, after such a windy Saturday

The wind can be strong and violent/forceful – windblown – being blown away by the Spirit

Something else happening that is also a sign – the Spirit is poured out to us and those it’s poured out to belong to God

Speaking the gospel in local languages; how to speak the good news – times when the Spirit is at work

Example – prayer service in Cameroonian village – not all speaking same language; recognized the song that we sang by the tune, not the words; praying together in other languages – “hear” what one another said.

Not always words, but presence

What it’s like to be a witness to Jesus Christ w/the work of the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit draws all together to get the message of Jesus out to all; Holy Spirit poured out for the sake of the world

Spirit poured out for the sake of the world – what Michelle is going to do; publicly proclaim what she believes; sharing her faith statement with all of you; knowing that what she believes and knows about Christ is what she is bringing out for the sake of the world. We pray that we are able to encourage her and equip her in this role.

The miracle is not that the Holy Spirit is available to all – because it is, that’s the truth.

The miracle is how gospel gets heard by people in their own way

Acts 1:8 (theme verse) – “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Other:

“do not let someone else read the Bible for you; read it for yourself. And, don’t interpret the Bible by yourself; interpret it within a community of believers.”

Other helpful resources, not listed within text:

Narrative Lectionary podcast

Text Week