

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Whitsunday

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw,¹ Supply Priest

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.³

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew [SHOW] wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁴

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to

be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson:

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even upon the menservants and maidservants
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In our Daily Office lectionary, the propers for Pentecost are the same every year. However, there are a number of passages in addition to those prescribed that are relevant to the day and are especially helpful in understanding the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church as that is described in the second chapter of Acts.⁶ One such passage is the eleventh chapter of Genesis, the story of the tower of Babel.

open before you and do your work of re-creation. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Orange, Virginia

June 4, 2006

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² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Joel 2:28-end (KJV).

⁴ Romans 8:1-11 (KJV).

⁵ Joel 2:28-29 (RSV).

⁶ Acts 2:1-end.

In that story, human beings got the idea that, by their own efforts, they could build a tower that would reach up to heaven itself. By doing that, they reasoned, they would establish for themselves a position of their own choosing in the order of things and a name that would last forever.

The attempt to do that is really another form of the attempt on the part of Adam and Eve to become as gods. The Eden story is an agricultural version; the Babel story is an engineering version. In both cases, the motivation is the same. Man is not content to occupy the place assigned to him by God in the order of things. He is not content to be dependent on God for anything. Man wants to replace God, and thus becomes the unwitting tool of Satan's rebellion.

The result of the Babel enterprise is the same as the result of the disobedience in the Garden. Man is first alienated from God, and then from his peers, and finally from the whole rest of creation. This alienation, this fragmentation of human society, takes the form, in the tower of Babel story, of the confusion of tongues. People who once could work together and cooperate with each other become unable even to communicate with each other.

But Pentecost reverses that. Pentecost brings together people from different parts of the world, from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and gives them a common language, a way to communicate with each other through the worship of God. Even within the Godhead, according to classical Trinitarian doctrine, integration and order are the result of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Alienation and confusion are always the result of the presence of the devil. These spirits are in conflict in the world we live in.

The work of Holy Spirit is to bring people together, to reconcile differences, and to bring order out of confusion. This work is linked in the Gospel for the day to the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the

sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

It is sin that has fragmented the world, and it is the human race that is the center of that fragmentation. To restore the unity and harmony of the universe, it is necessary for man to be reconciled with God and to accept the place in the order of things that God has set aside for him. In Biblical talk, that means the forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Spirit is constantly linked to the work of Jesus, because it is Jesus who was given the task of making atonement for the sins of the world. That is why the Holy Spirit was present at the baptism of Jesus. That is why the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. That is why we say in the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The confusion of tongues resulted from the arrogance, the disobedience, and the self-centeredness of man. The reversal of that confusion came about through the humility, the obedience, and the self-sacrifice of Christ. That is why I say that the Babel story would be an appropriate lesson for today, with the narrative from Acts as the Epistle.

The act of creation in the Bible is the act of establishing relationships. Genesis says, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”

The Bible goes on to tell about how God spoke the Word, and defined the boundaries of light and darkness, of land and sea, and how He arranged the stars and the sun and the moon in their places, and how He created man and put him in a position of authority over and responsibility for the rest of the creatures that inhabit the planet. The act of creation, or of re-creation, is the act of putting relationships in place. It begins when the Holy Spirit enters into the chaos.

That same Holy Spirit moves over the chaos of every human heart to establish or re-establish the relationships that constitute salvation. The spirit brings us to the Son. The Son brings us to the Father. Thus we are reborn, re-created, as it were, by the restoration of unity with God and with each other.

But the Spirit cannot do His work if we continue to rebel. The atoning work of Jesus is of no effect if we continue to rely on our own efforts and our own cleverness to build a tower to heaven. The spirit of alienation and confusion is still alive in all of us as long as we harbor the spirit of rebellion.

God is able to bring order out of any chaos that you find in your life. He is able to restore the broken relationships that you have, not only with Him but with your fellow human beings. God is able to bridge all the gaps and knock down all the barriers that destroy the universal community of mankind. But in order for that to happen in your life, you must accept God’s gift, the forgiveness of your sins. You must allow God to work in you without interposing your own agenda or letting your pride get in the way.

It is God who creates. It is God who heals. It is God who reconciles. It is God who unites. It is God who overcomes death. It is God who forgives sins. And it is God who waits for you to repent of your rebellion against Him and accept your proper place as His ever dependent, ever obedient, and ever beloved creation. Will you do that? Will you do it now?

No, I’m not going to issue an altar call or even ask you to hold up your hand, but I am going to pray for you.

Father of all, we thank you for sending your Son to offer Himself for the forgiveness of our sins. We thank you sending your Spirit to heal our divisions and to lead us into all truth. We ask you to remove from us the willfulness, the pride, the self-centeredness, and all other obstacles that keep us apart from you and from each other. Look into each heart that now lies