

Weekly Reading – Monday, May 10, 2010

Acts 2: 1-21

Jesus had given the disciples clear instructions. They were to go back to Jerusalem and wait. To know times and seasons was not their job. To wait for the gift of power from the Holy Spirit was. So they went back to Jerusalem, gathered with other followers of Jesus in an upper room, and waited. They prayed a lot. And they waited. They were alone and a bit tentative, now that Jesus had finally left them. But they did what he said: they prayed and waited.

And then the Spirit made Her move. It was the same Spirit that moved over the face of the void and breathed creation into being. It was the same Spirit that blew life-giving breath into dust to create human beings. It was the same Spirit who had descended upon David and the prophets. She had also descended as a dove on Jesus and kept him company along the way. That same Spirit blew into the upper room, blowing the socks off those tentative disciples.

Words can never capture an experience of the divine. It was “like” the rush of a violent wind. Divided tongues “as of” fire rested on each and every one of them. Literally? No. Really? Yes. Even if words can’t convey the power of such an experience, one thing is for certain: when the Spirit blows through, transformation happens. And those tentative, fearful disciples experienced that too. They were changed. They were empowered with the capacity to speak in such a way that all their fellow Jews from around the world could understand what they said about Jesus. Now that’s empowerment! And transformation!

The Spirit made the message clear. How it was received was up to the listener. That’s the second part of the equation. Peter’s message is a powerful one. He quotes from the prophet Joel; a familiar passage to any Jew longing for the “Last Day” when God would show up and destroy all of Israel’s enemies. The Hebrew Scriptures often depict that final day as one when the evil ones get their due. Peter quotes from that passage, but he makes a daring shift in emphasis. He claims that the “Last Day” has arrived, and the focus is not on judgment, but on the offer of salvation to all who will turn to receive it. That’s a change in interpretation of the prophet. It’s not a negation of the old interpretation, but it is a transformation of it. The Spirit keeps doing that transformational work.

Peter and the others were empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to what they had experienced in Jesus. And the word that came out of Peter’s mouth was a new twist on the continuing story of God’s saving work in the world. The offer of wholeness and restoration is to all. It is for all. Period.

Nothing else need be said.

Romans 8: 14 – 17

What's the difference between being a slave and being adopted? That seems to be the question here.

Slaves are subject to the momentary wishes and whims of their owner. One day they may be in their owner's good favor and the next sold off to someone else. There is no long-term commitment involved in a slave-owner relationship. And that means the slave must constantly live in fear, never being able to rest easy, always anxious about what tomorrow might bring.

Adoption necessarily entails a commitment from the new parent, a long-term commitment. When those adoption papers are signed, it's a done deal. The child no longer needs to fear being abandoned. She doesn't have to worry about needing to be perfect to earn the adult's favor. There are no strings attached, except the bonds of a life long promise.

Guess what? God has adopted us. So we can rest easy; we can live freely. All because God has chosen to claim us as His own.

John 14: 8-17

What's the right way to come to believe in Jesus? Is it that we affirm that he was sent by God, in some mysterious and wonderful way God-present-among-us? Or is it that we see what he does, how he heals, how he forgives, how he welcomes, how he loves so much as to give up his life for us? Jesus says it doesn't matter how we come to belief. That we come to it is most important.

Well, not really just that. You see, there is a second part to belief in Jesus. It entails our own lives and how we live. Belief in Jesus must lead to life like his, to love like his. That's what he says. When we know and are wrapped up in his love, we cannot help but embody that same kind of love into the world. That sounds like a tall order, and it is. But the good news is that, once again, God has given us what we need to do that. The Spirit is the gift to us for that purpose. Let's let her do Her work, shall we?