

Day of Pentecost

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Introduction

Pentecost marks the birth of the Church and the empowering of the disciples with the breath of life that echoes the creation narratives. While the writer of Acts records the disciples speaking the tongues of many, John's Pentecost provides the opportunity to speak the language of forgiveness.

Text

John 20:19–23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Comment

The Johannine Pentecost is situated in the aftermath of conflict and violence. The crucifixion had taken place just a few days earlier, followed by the confusion of Easter's empty tomb. The disciples, lost- returned home.

The disciples are gathered together in a space marked safe by the closed door. When Jesus enters the room he utters the words "Peace be with you." In the anxiety and uncertainty of the moment these traditional words of welcome provide familiarity and grounding.

Coming amongst the disciples Jesus shows his wounds- wounds not yet healed by time; wounds confirming both his presence and the trauma they had witnessed. He is effectively saying:

"This really happened"

In displaying his wounds Jesus also provides a way for the disciples how to be open to their own vulnerability. As they are welcomed deeper into the pain of his story, they are welcomed deeper into their own stories, deeper into themselves and into the gospel.

It is perhaps useful we don't know the length of time they spent examining Jesus' hands and side, but at the end of the process they emerge from their fear into joy (v20).

Jesus welcomes them anew, repeating His words "Peace be with you."

Aligning their mission with his "As the Father sent me... I send you" Jesus breathes on them saying "Receive the Spirit" granting permission to forgive.

The place of fear and pain can become also the place of healing or letting go. A therapist friend explained it to me this way: "We need to see our wounds and feel our pain. That's where God can be closest. And then our attention is not on holding pain, but following it to learn how we can release it."

There is no simplified roadmap to forgiving in this text, only the exhortation to the journey with the example of Jesus and the Spirit leading us to into a better truth.

Response

What do the words "Peace be with you" mean to you?

What are the stories in us and around that need to be recognised and affirmed?

While Jesus grants authority/permission to forgive sin he also gives permission to withhold forgiveness. It is not a journey that can be rushed.

What tools do you have at your disposal for acknowledging your own wounds/trauma? Who guides you on your own path to healing?

Prayer

Jesus, who speaks peace in our place of fear,

Whose wounds provide healing—

Help us to be tender to the wounds of our own lives
As we speak words of healing to others.

May the Spirit within
Bring us to the freedom of forgiveness
You desire for us all.

Amen

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: