

From Spectators to Participants

Perhaps you haven't noticed, but we've come a very long way in our journey of faith.

Beginning with Christmas, with the birth of the Messiah in a barn, in a no-account village, in a no-account country.

Then through the healing ministry of Jesus among us.

Then to his crucifixion, remembered on Good Friday, and on to the miracle of resurrection — Easter morning.

And finally, to the closing chapter of his time here on earth: his Ascension that we celebrated just last week.

Throughout all of this, we have been spectators.

Today, on this day of Pentecost, on this day of the Holy Spirit descending upon all of God's people, today, we are no longer spectators.

Today, and forever more, we take our place as participants in God's ever-unfolding new creation.

And yet this journey we have travelled actually began long before that first Christmas morning.

Way back in the first book of the Bible, way back in Genesis, we listen in on the story of the tower of Babel.

A story that teaches us that whenever humanity tries on its own to reach God, only disaster results.

Because we live in a fallen world.

Because our obsessions with caste and class, with race and riches, with pride and prejudice keep us in the merciless grip of the powers and principalities of this fallen world.

And so in that very first book of the Bible, in response to the story of Babel, God begins God's intentional and enduring work of coming to our rescue.

He begins with Abraham, an old man with one redeeming quality: he listens and obeys when the call comes.

He listens and obeys, leaving his country behind, along with nearly everything and everyone he knows.

He obeys, even when called upon to sacrifice his beloved son.

A sacrifice Abraham is spared from making.

(A sacrifice the Triune God does however, endure).

God's rescue plan for humanity continues when God calls the Jewish people out of slavery from Egypt.

Moses listens and obeys and before you know it, God is pouring out his spirit on 70 of the elders.

As time passes, God continues to pour out his Spirit, as the prophet Joel comes to see, the day will dawn when everyone is caught up in God's Spirit.

All of that brings us to this day of Pentecost, when Jesus, in his apparent absence, comes roaring back with the full force of the

Holy Spirit — into the lives and hearts and minds of not only his faithful followers, but of multitudes gathered in Jerusalem.

And here's the thing.

That same Spirit?

It's in you!

That same Spirit was given to you, as a free gift, at your baptism.

And the power of that Spirit, if only we allow it, is something that can and will and is changing the world.

Easy words to say, I suppose, on a Sunday morning as we safely sit in our church building.

What about the wars that are raging?

The gun violence that is rampant throughout our nation?

The gross inequalities in wealth?

The vicious racism?

The separation of people into tribes, clubs, and creeds?

And yet, what the Spirit of God allows us to see is that this broken world is not the last word.

That this broken world isn't the only world.

There's another world just waiting to be born.

And Pentecost gives us the eyes to see it.

As Thomas Traherne writes:

"You never enjoy the world aright til the sea flows in your veins,
til your spirit fills the whole world, and the stars are your jewels.

Til you love people so as to desire their happiness with a thirst
equal to the zeal of your own; til you delight in God for being good
to all.

The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no one sees it.

It's a temple of majesty, yet no one regards it.

It's a region of light and peace.

It's the paradise of God." Modified.

The Holy Spirit allows us to see the reality of God's world, that
incorporates and encapsulates and will one day redeem, this broken
world.

Isn't that the final destiny for all of creation?

When all that is shall be restored?

This is the great truth at the heart of our faith.

It's the story of God's rescue mission for humanity.

Doing for us what we could not and cannot do for ourselves.

And with the power of the Holy Spirit moving within each and every one of us, we too are part of this glorious rescue mission.

We are given the eyes to see that in the midst of this world's pain and brokenness is another world of infinite beauty, kindness and peace.

The Holy Spirit allows us to develop, to nurture, to have confidence in, a merciful heart.

As Saint Isaac the Syrian asks:

“What is a merciful heart?

It is a heart aflame for all creation, for people, birds, beasts, demons, and every created thing; the very thought or sight of them causes the merciful one's eyes to overflow with tears.

The heart of such a person is humbled by the powerful and fervent mercy that has captured it, and by the immense compassion it feels, and it cannot endure to see or hear of any suffering or any grief anywhere within creation.

Therefore, she constantly lifts up tearful prayers for God's care and mercy upon even unreasoning brutes and enemies of truth, and all who do her harm.” Modified.

The gift of the Holy Spirit not only creates in us a merciful heart, but it also introduces us to the stunning reality of the Cosmic Christ.

And it invites the Cosmic Christ, the one through whom all things are made, the one in whom we all live and move and have our being, to make his home in us.

As Saint Paul says, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Gal. 2:20.

That truth belongs to you.

It is the gift of the Holy Spirit who allows us to let go of controlling people, places and things.

It is the gift of the Holy Spirit who allows us to welcome every happiness and every calamity that arrives at our doorstep – and to see in each of them valued guests who have something invaluable to teach us. Rumi.

It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to enter into the flow of life – so that we can joyfully swim within the river of life that Jesus speaks of in today's gospel.

It is recognizing our true situation: that we are beloved, and now rescued children of the Living God, despite all the seeming evidence to the contrary.

So this Pentecost, can we open our minds to the truth of our existence?

Can we pray for the grace to see and hear the beating heart of the Cosmic Christ in which all things live and move and have their being?

Can we come to see the Spirit of God infused in all people and in all things?

Can we come to accept that we are no longer spectators in the unfolding drama of life, but necessary **participants** in the creation of God's new world?

A world which, despite God's seeming absence, is saturated with God.

As the mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg delightfully discovers:

One day I saw with the eyes of my eternity
In bliss and without effort,
a stone.

This stone was like a great mountain
Made up of countless colors.

It tasted sweet, like heavenly herbs.

I asked the sweet stone:

Who are you?

It replied:

'I am Jesus.'

And as Jesus says to his friends before he leaves them:

"I am the All.

And the All has gone out from me.

And the All has come back to me.

Split a piece of wood, and I am there.

Lift a stone, and you will find me there."

Gospel of Thomas, Logion, 77.

+amen