

God's Great Conspiracy to Love

Acts 2:1-21, May 20, 2018

It's an interesting word: the verb "conspire," or in its noun form: "conspiracy." The word actually comes from two Latin words. There is, first of all, the **Latin word "con"** that means **"together"** and the **Latin verb "spirare"** that means "to breathe." In its most basic form, therefore, the word "conspire" means **"to breathe together."**

Since it's **Pentecost Sunday today, and there was a lot of interaction** that took place among the followers of Jesus on that first Pentecost, I was hoping we might mimic that interaction just a little bit by my asking you to please participate with me now in a little **"interactive exercise"** ourselves!

Would you please **"inhale,"** take in a deep breath? Would you hold it momentarily? Now breathe out that same air together! **So, there you have it, my friends, you and I have just launched a conspiracy!**

Today I want to talk to you about God's own great conspiracy to love our fallen human race, remembering that a **conspiracy is something that is, for the most part, ALWAYS, INITIALLY A "SECRET!"** Why this is very language that Paul uses in his closing words about the Gospel in his letter to the Church of Rome. Here Paul says: **"Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel . . . that has been kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed through Jesus Christ, to him be glory forever" (Romans 16:25-27)!**

People who conspire to do something are people who are **breathing in the same air!** They are **thinking the same thoughts!** They are **committed to a common endeavor!** People who conspire to do something are, to use a popular expression of our day are: **"Partners in crime together!"** And sometimes we use that word in a very serious way, at other times, in a very light-hearted, humorous way!

Secondly, there are often times something that would be **CONSIDERED ILLEGAL CONNECTED WITH A CONSPIRACY.** **GOD THE FATHER'S GREAT CONSPIRACY WAS TO PUT TO DEATH AN INNOCENT MAN -- FOR CRIMES THAT HE NEVER COMMITTED.** But because this was a divine conspiracy -- and not a human conspiracy, God the Son was willing to take this dreadful punishment upon himself in our stead for us.

JESUS WAS NO VICTIM OF FATE WHOSE LIFE WAS WRENCHED AWAY FROM HIM AGAINST HIS WILL. HE SAYS: "I lay down my life freely OF MY OWN ACCORD, I HAVE THE POWER TO LAY IT DOWN AND THE POWER TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN" (John 10:17-18)!

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONE WHO STILL CONSPIRES WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON TO FILL OUR HEARTS AND MINDS WITH THE FAITH THAT OUR SINS ALL FORGIVEN AND THAT WE ARE ALL SIMULTANEOUSLY, NO PEOPLE LESS THAN INHERITORS OF ETERNAL LIFE!

Today we are celebrating the Festival of Pentecost! And why is the Festival of Pentecost so important? Because Pentecost celebrates the birthday of the Church! And we like to celebrate birthdays, don't we?

For couples who love each other, having a baby is very special time! People, who love the mother and the father of that newborn baby, shower the baby with a few gifts. But the birth of a baby is considered to be such a significant event -- that the celebration, in our Western Culture at least, continues year after year.

When you, present people with cards and a birthday cake and a few gifts, you are doing your best to convince them that they are special and that you love them! Today is the birthday of the Church, and because we love the Church we want to celebrate the Church's birthday and say the same thing to her!

Yes, the events of that first Pentecost Sunday were part of God's great conspiracy to love and to redeem our fallen human race and I am hoping we might spend a little time together today prayerfully considering those six miracles that took place in connection with that first Pentecost!

The FIRST MIRACLE is found in the first verse of our text: ***"When the Day of Pentecost arrived, THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE!"*** Some translations say: ***"They were all with one accord!"***

That these first disciples of the Risen Christ were altogether in one place doesn't simply mean that they were all present at the same physical address, as we are here this morning at 1541 Lake Murray Boulevard! What it means is that they were altogether as people of one mind and one spirit--without the slightest trace of discord among them!

It is a very beautiful and lovely state of affairs, isn't it, when people in a church family, rather than **being divided with conflict are instead united in a true spirit of harmony; people who continue to this day to openly share, in words and deeds, the great love that they have for one another!**

But this was just the beginning of what we are celebrating today! That was the quiet part! But **soon after this, things got noisy -- and by noisy -- I mean very, very noisy!** ***"And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting" (v. 2)!***

The SECOND MIRACLE OF PENTECOST WAS THAT OF A VERY LOUD NOISE THAT CAUGHT THE DISCIPLES' ATTENTION INITIALLY. It was like a STEREO ON STEROIDS! NOISY! IT WAS LIKE A MIGHTY FREIGHT TRAIN COMING DOWN THE TRACKS! IT WAS LIKE THE NOISE OF A JET PLANE FLYING VERY LOW OVERHEAD!

Please notice that our text **does not say that there was a wind.** It says that there was a **sound!** It sounded **like the wind.** It sounded ***"like the rush of a mighty wind and it filled the ENTIRE HOUSE where they were sitting!"*** **THAT**

SOUND, I HAVE TO BELIEVE, WAS GOD'S WAY OF GETTING EVERYONE'S ATTENTION!

THE THIRD MIRACLE OF PENTECOST is that these: *“Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them and rested on each one of them” (verse 3)!* Have you ever noticed that the **Bible doesn't say that they were actual tongues of fire?** It says that they **looked like fire!** They **danced like fire!**

This must mean, that these divided tongues, like fire, **LIT UP THE ENTIRE ROOM LIKE FIRE.** These **“tongues as of fire”** was **God's way of energizing his disciples.** These **“tongues as of fire”** was **God's way of saying to Jesus' disciples once again: “You are mine! You belong to me! And I am going to set your hearts and minds afire for the Gospel!”**

The FOURTH MIRACLE OF PENTECOST is that the **Holy Spirit was poured out in full measure upon each of them!** From this moment on, the Holy Spirit would live within them. From this moment on, God's Spirit would guide them and speak through them and give them the power to completely change the lives of people; and in doing so, to some degree, at least, they would change the world forever! **Our world today is vastly different than it would have been had God not filled those disciples, on that first Pentecost Sunday, with the enlightening gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Before I tell you about the **FIFTH MIRACLE OF PENTECOST,** please let me give you a little background! **Pentecost was one of the three great Jewish feasts, and all Jews were expected to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once in their lifetimes to participate in these feasts.** All orthodox Jewish men who lived within the short distance of being only 15 miles or less from Jerusalem were expected to be there every year!

Therefore, Jerusalem, was full of pilgrims! Tens of thousands of pilgrims! Pilgrims who were, as St. Luke typifies them for us here: **“Devout men from every nation under heaven” (v. 5)!** **“And at this sound, the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language” (v. 6)!**

THE FIFTH MIRACLE OF PENTECOST IS THAT THE DISCIPLES BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES AS THE HOLY SPIRIT GAVE THEM THE ABILITY TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES! In other words, my friends, no translator was present, and no translator was required.

But better yet, please let me rephrase this: There was one translator and this translator was the Holy Spirit! We don't know whether the Holy Spirit transformed the disciples' mouths or the hearers' ears. I don't know HOW the Holy Spirit did it! I only know that each pilgrim **heard the disciples' preaching in his or her own language!** And all the Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for that particular celebration of Pentecost -- recognized it as a miracle! They asked how in the world it could be that they, coming from all over the world, could hear the preaching in their own languages!

Jerusalem, far from Galilee, was the home of many educated people! Some of these educated people were trained to speak in different languages. But Galilee was, by comparison, what some folks used to call here in the United States “**the sticks,**” when they talked about people living far away from all cultural and metropolitan centers! People would say that they are living out there in the “**sticks!**” And the people living there themselves, like Jesus’ first disciples, were called “**hicks!**”

Furthermore, they said, “Aren’t these all Galileans” (v. 7)!?!

If there was going to be a miracle of languages, no one would have ever expected it to befall upon Galileans! So this was the fifth miracle! God did all of these things to get the peoples’ attention! Once he had their attention, God inspired Peter to preach a great sermon; a great sermon about how everything that was taking place there that day--was taking place in fulfillment of an ancient prophecy God had made to his people of old through Joel. **The Prophet Joel said:** “*And in the last days, it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters, shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy!*”

Once Peter concluded his sermon, 3000 people lined up to be baptized--the sixth and last miracle of Pentecost! St Luke tells us that initially there were 120 believers gathered there that day (Acts 1:15). If they divided the 3000 people among them, each disciple would have had to baptize 25 people! If only the apostles conducted baptisms, each apostle would have had to baptize 250 people. Either way, it would have been time-consuming and a lot of work--but I am sure no one was complaining! I certainly wouldn’t complain about having the privilege of baptizing 250 people all on the same day! **But, please, let me conclude this message today, by repeating Peter’s words:** “*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (v. 21)! **These dozen words summarize the WHOLE GOSPEL!** Three of these words were especially important and I want to be sure that you hear them:

THE FIRST IMPORTANT WORD IS “WHOEVER.” The word “whoever” is much like the word “whosoever” in John 3:16! There are no exceptions and this is good news! I know that we have people, however, in every Christian congregation who wonder if it is possible that God would be willing to save them. They could tell you that they have thought things, said things, and done things that they knew to be terribly wrong, and can’t imagine how in the world God could ever forgive them! **But is anyone here this morning totally excluded from this category? Haven’t we all thought things, said things, done things that we know were terribly wrong--and how will God forgive us! Through the power of his Son’s crucifixion on the cross!**

THE SECOND IMPORTANT WORD IS “LORD.” When Peter uses the word “Lord” he means, unequivocally, “Jesus!” It’s by our calling on Jesus that we alone can enter the kingdom of God; that God is willing to pour out his Holy Spirit afresh, upon each one of us again today! And the good news is that entering the kingdom of God is not something that we have to wait to take place on the day that we die a physical death! We are part of the

kingdom of God now! God is willing and desiring to rule over our hearts and minds already now and we will also, however, be part of God's kingdom throughout eternity!

THE THIRD IMPORTANT WORD IS "SAVED." Those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, Peter tells us! Saved for eternity? For sure! Saved for heaven? To be certain! But saved already in the here and now as well! If we follow Jesus, he will lead us day by day around many of the potholes of life. He will save us from the evil one!

Let me close by repeating verse 21 once again! It is so important!

***"And it shall come to pass that
everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord
shall be saved!" Amen***