Worship Resources for May 19th—Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 11:1-9 (or Acts 2:1-21); Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; John 14:8-17, 25-27; Acts 2:1-21 or Romans 8:14-17

We have reached the day of Pentecost! Pentecost for 50 marks the 50 days (7 weeks) after Easter, but it also marks the spring harvest festival in the Jewish tradition. It has become the celebration of the birthday of the Church in the Christian tradition, acknowledging the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Genesis 11:1-9 is sort of the antithesis to the Acts 2 story often read on Pentecost: the Tower of Babel. The people go from having one language and build up a tower to make a name for themselves; in the Acts passage, the Holy Spirit comes from heaven upon them, and they are able to speak and to understand one another in different languages. The people are scattered from the Tower of Babel in Genesis, and their language confused (a play on Babel-“Babble”); whereas the disciples are gathered together, and their language is different, but they are able to understand one another. It is an interesting dichotomy to read the two stories—in one, a group of people try to make a name for themselves by building a tower to the heavens; in another, the group have gathered out of faith and are given the call to share the Good News of “God’s deeds of power” (vs. 11). A good question for us Christians today: are we building towers (i.e. church buildings or institutions) for our own satisfaction, or are we gathering in places where we can be sent out to share the Good News?

Psalm 104:24-34 and 35b praises God for the vastness and wonder of creation and that God is the provider for all. All creatures look to God for their sustenance and care, their creation and even in their death and renewal. This is a wonderful song of praise, but the Revised Common Lectionary leaves out 35a “Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more.” I think it is important personally to understand the context, that many of the Psalms do contain harsh words towards the enemies of the writer’s community. In this particular context, the earth is full of God’s goodness—let what is not good, what is not created by God, what is destructive to the earth be banished. For God is the Creator, and God created all things and said, “It is good” (Genesis 1:1).

John 14:8-17, 25-27 are part of Jesus’ final discourse to the disciples before his death, sharing the promise that they will not be left alone—that the Holy Spirit will come and be among them. It’s clear that the disciples do not understand—Jesus has just told them that he is the way to the Father, and Philip says, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” I can almost imagine Jesus just shaking his head in frustration! For the disciples, if they know Jesus, then they know God—the way of God is the way of Jesus. John’s Gospel uses the word “paraclete” for the Spirit—the Advocate, or the Helper—or the Defender. We do not have to fear, because we know God is present with us, always.

Acts 2:1-21, the Day of Pentecost, is read every year. Some congregations choose to read this passage in different languages. The first part of this passage is an account of the events when the disciples are gathered together in one place, and it feels like the rush of a sudden wind, with this strange image of divided tongues like fire resting on each one of them, and they are able to understand and speak to one another in their various languages. Very strange! The second part of this passage is Peter’s address to the crowd who just sees a bunch of drunk people celebrating. Peter quotes the prophet Joel about the prophetic movement in God’s people, and declares that this is what is happening: God is doing a new thing. God is using all people to proclaim the Good News of God’s love and salvation. This foreshadows the work of Acts, which moves Christianity from a Jewish movement into one that reaches out to the Gentiles—the Others. Acts 2 reminds us that God continues to open the old traditions and scriptures in new ways to us. God continues to use our experiences to teach us new things. And God continues to show us that the boundaries and dividing walls that we put in place, such as male/female, Jew/Greek, etc. are broken down by the work of God through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14-17 declares that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. The way of God is to include, bless, love and build up; the way of the world is to divide, separate, and condemn. We witness God’s love in our inclusion of one another and in our sharing of God’s love with all. This is not a new idea that Paul has, but a very old belief that began with the Jewish people: that all of us are created as children of God, that God loves us all. What is new is that this message goes beyond one group of people, but to all human beings.

God has entered our lives in a new way, but yet it is an old, old story. The wind from God swept over the waters in the very beginning of time, in our own Creation story in Genesis 1. But this wind from God—the Spirit (and the word Spirit, wind and breath is the same in Hebrew, *ruach,* and in Greek, *pneuma*) continues to move among us and the world and do new things. We are called to break down the dividing walls and to build up one another in Christ. We are called to turn away from the things that separate us from one another and turn instead to the love of God, who calls us to share this love with our brothers and sisters in the world. And God is continuing to do a new thing in us, if we are open to receive and recognize the Spirit’s movement among us.

Call to Worship:

When we feel alone, when we feel rejected

 **Come, Holy Spirit, Come!**

When we feel drained and dried up, and we can’t give any more,

 **Come, Holy Spirit, Come!**

When we are unsure of how to move or where to go or what to do,

 **Come, Holy Spirit, Come!**

Come, Holy Spirit, Revive us, move in us, and encourage us on the journey of faith.

 **Come, Holy Spirit, Come! Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Spirit of Life, we come to You, knowing You are the one who fills us when we feel empty. You are the one who restores us when we are broken. You are the one who guides us when we feel we have lost our vision. You are the one who encourages us on the way. You are our Advocate, our Defender—You are on our side when we feel that the world is against us. Renew us. Give us strength and wisdom, and lead us onward. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is known to us in many ways, and sometimes God surprises us in something new, out of the ordinary, out of our comfort zone. Know that God is not going to leave you or abandon you on the way, but walk with you in your steps, and move in you with every breath, for the Spirit is the breath of life. Know this: God loves you. God loves you madly, even enough to pull you along when you don’t feel like you can make it. Know this: You are loved by God, forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer

God, You are Mystery with a capital M. You are the Creator who made all things. You are Christ who loved us so much You gave your life for us. You are the Spirit, who moved over the waters of creation, stirs in the hearts of people and gives wisdom and insight, and calls us into new beginnings. You are the three in one, You are the Mystery. Help us to not be afraid of the unknown, and give us courage to explore new understandings. Guide us on this journey of faith away from fear and into hope, wonder and amazement. Amen.