

Today we celebrate the day of Pentecost. Pentecost or *Shavuot* was a Jewish harvest festival celebrated fifty days after the Passover. Along with the Passover, this was one of the three great pilgrim festivals that brought devout Jews from all over the known world to Jerusalem in order to give thanks and praise to God.

Repeated conquests had led generations of the people of Judea to flee to other countries. Consequently, hyphenated identities had evolved — Jewish Egyptians and Jewish Syrians in the same way that today we speak of African Americans or Latin Americans. It's likely that most of the people who travelled to Jerusalem for the festival were descendants of several generations of Jews who had lived outside Palestine. They, their parents, and their grandparents were born and raised in the lands from which they came. They were in a real sense, residents if not citizens of these nations; yet they remained devout Jews—both ethnically and religiously.¹

In the midst of all the Pentecost excitement, the disciples were meeting together when a fresh wind blew through the house, it seemed as though tongues of fire were on their heads and they began to speak in other languages. And, amazingly, as they spoke, these foreign Jews understood them. 'Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'" Notice that they "began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" - it isn't that the visitors were given the ears to hear the dominant language, but that the disciples were given the ability to speak all the different native languages. The miracle was one of hospitality to the stranger.

This is the beginning of the Jesus movement that became the church. It begins in a multi-ethnic situation with the good news being shared in a myriad languages to people of different colors and different nations. We can see it as the reverse of the ancient story of the tower of Babel where God is said to have given humans different languages so that we could not cooperate together. In contrast, here in Jerusalem at the very beginning of the Christian Church, the language barrier is unimportant, as is race or the color of skin. Here God speaks not in the temple or through the religious authorities or even the political ones. Here, God speaks in the streets through the lips of ordinary people who confound the normal barriers of race and language.

As we become more and more aware of our interconnection with all beings; as we become more and more aware that God is not a white guy on a cloud but is Interbeing – that which connects us and brings life to every part of the cosmos, so we realize that barriers such as skin color are illusory. We humans are connected to each other, both those we know and those we don't. Those

¹ <http://www.politicaltheology.com/blog/the-politics-of-acts-21-21/>

of us who are white are not separate from those who are black; those who are straight are not separate from those who are gay; those who are Moslem are not separate from those who are Christian. Yes there are undeniable differences of language, culture and religion, but in our connection with Spirit we are all one. Paul grasped this when he wrote, "Gone is the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female—you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) The good news is not the property of one person or one group; the good news was freely available to everyone in the streets of Jerusalem.

I get most of my news watching the television at the gym. And it seems that whenever I'm there they're talking about Trump. They've forgotten the refugee crisis in Europe, the daily suicide bombings in Baghdad, the unravelling of Venezuela; even ISIS has taken a back seat. Instead it's all Trump. Why? Because Trump makes news, and news makes money. Leslie Moonves, CEO of CBS recently said of the presidential race, "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS." He called the campaign for president a "circus" full of "bomb throwing," and he hopes it continues.²

A circus full of bomb throwing. And at whose expense? Muslims, Mexicans and other minority groups. We are daily seeing hatred being applauded and admired. It's not long since the main group being scapegoated for political gain was gays and lesbians; now it's Moslems, Mexicans, women who have abortions, and more subtly, transgender people. These people are being scapegoated for all the ills of American society; made the whipping boys of people's anger and aggression.

This isn't just an unusual election year, it's a moment of moral crisis in our national life.

I will not endorse any political candidate; I'm never going to tell you to vote for Trump or Clinton or Sanders. But what I am going to tell you is that as Albert Einstein said, "The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it." "The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it." When tens of thousands of people were fleeing the fighting in Syria, instead of calling for humane and compassionate international solutions, Trump called for a complete ban on Muslims entering America. This kind of statement incites hatred and violence. Trump has declared that infectious disease is coming into the United States from Mexico, that "the Mexican Government is forcing their most unwanted people into the United States. They are, in many cases, criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc."³ This kind of misrepresentation is not just wrong, it gets angry people angrier and ready to take out their anger on Muslims and Mexicans, or people they think might be Muslim or Mexican or really anyone who seems different from them.

² <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/leslie-moonves-donald-trump-may-871464>

³ <http://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trumps-epic-statement-on-mexico-2015-7>

“The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it.” We, my friends, are tolerating evil. And we only have to look at the history of Europe in the twentieth century to know what the results of that can be.

What can we do? First we can pray. We can pray for Trump and for those who harbor hatred. Secondly we can look at the hatred that is in our own hearts and minds, and work with the Holy Spirit to transform that into forgiveness and acceptance. Practically we can make relationships across the barriers that separate us from others.

Recently I was walking my dog at the same time as a man with an older terrier. We chatted about dogs and then he told me that he had been in Oregon, one of the armed people facing off against law enforcement over the wildlife reserve. I was, quite honestly, shocked and a little nervous. We have met a couple of times now and he has explained a bit to me about the world as he sees it, at least in so far as it relates to state’s rights versus federal rights. It’s quite eye opening. But I am still very cautious about him.

Making relationship across difference can be scary. Next Saturday the diocese is hosting Joan Blades, one of the founders of Moveon.org who is now working to bring people of very different opinions together in conversation. Our democracy depends upon civil society; a society in which people talk together, argue together and work together for the common good. I hope that some of you might join me at the diocesan conference to hear Joan Blades and think about how we here at St Ben’s can stimulate conversation across difference.

So, practically, we can make relationships across the barriers that seem to divide us and we can make our opinions known whenever we hear bigotry being promulgated or applauded. We do not do this in an angry way but in a way that respects the people involved while gently making it clear that it is unacceptable to us.

It is important that, as the people of a church formed in an interracial, multi-cultural moment of God, we work actively through all the methods available to us, both inner and outer, for a just and fair society where all are welcome and all are equal, where racism and bigotry become things of the past. Let us not be counted among those who tolerated evil and failed to act.