

Year A Pentecost
June 12, 2011
Parish of the Epiphany, Winchester
The Rev. Roger E. Nelson

Today is every lay reader's nightmare!

Amazed and astonished, (the crowds) 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, Pontes 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 (the disciples) speaking about God's deeds of power.

That was the very first Pentecost, 2000 years ago – a vast mixture of nationalities and ethnicities and creeds.

Now look around you as we at Epiphany celebrate Pentecost, 2011. Mostly white. Mostly middle class, indeed probably upper middle class. Mostly college educated. What is the expression that is used? "White beard?" Yes, we do have Daniel and Das, Dinah and Jacob. And I can't imagine Sunday morning here without Ici. And Solomon and Joe bring into our assembly some of the very blood that was there on that first Pentecost. But on the whole, we probably see ourselves as not very diverse; maybe even feel a little twinge of guilt about that reality.

Well, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "good news" and the good news you need to hear this morning is that the parish assembled here today in celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit is much more diverse that is visible to the naked eye. And it is because of the work of the Holy Spirit among us that this is true. This morning this church building is filled with all sorts and conditions of people, bursting at the seams because they can barely all fit in. They overflow out the doors and into the streets; down the hallway and into Hadley Hall; filling the Cloister like sardines packed into a tin. There are hundreds, perhaps even a couple of thousand, people here today.

Let me tell you who they are. Take a good look around you. Then close your eyes and let me tell you who is here today that you didn't see.

First of all, there are all the third, fourth, and fifth graders who make use of the library at the Blackstone School in Boston's South End. And their diversity in ethnicity and creed and race probably surpasses even that of the first Pentecost. They are all here with us this morning, their excited voices filling the air and their constant motion sweeping through this place like a wave at Fenway Park. And there are many, many others here also. Now close your eyes. Over there on the left are the young women from Germaine Lawrence House, struggling to survive their teen age years intact. And on the right we have the crowds of people who are literally hungry and who come for aid at Saint Luke's/San

Lucas food pantry in Chelsea, the Council of Social Concern in Woburn, the Thanksgiving Turkey Wahoo dinner at Saint Stephen's, and to the Boston Church of Saint John the Evangelist to be fed by Saturday's/Sunday's Bread.

And I have only just begun to describe the crowds that are with us this morning (so don't open your eyes yet.) There are over one hundred members of AA. There are the mothers and children of Brookview House Dorchester. And look, over there on the front left are hundreds of Haitians who recently sought medical help from a medical team that traveled to their villages. And on the right front are is endless stream of African children receiving books of their own.

Is there room for anyone else? Indeed there is! For now streaming in through the back and side doors of the church are the young boys and girls from El Hogar and the young men of the technical and farming schools, including the one you may help support. And there are countless others whom I cannot even see, let alone identify.

So now open your eyes and look around you once again, this time through the eyes of faith. See and hear the multitudes that are here this morning – the countless, endless hosts of people that you have made a part of this congregation because the Holy Spirit of God has moved you to bring them into our circle of caring and love. All these our neighbors are not objects of our charity, they are brothers and sisters in Christ whom we have been called by the Spirit to serve and to love.

Scripture says in today's Gospel that "Out if the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." And this is true. Because of the first Pentecost the disciples of Jesus were empowered to love and to serve all persons, that all persons may come to know the love of God incarnate in the Son Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

All of the outreach and mission that we do as a Parish, we do not do because we are good and giving people. That we may well be. But the power and strength that lies behind our moving out and beyond our walls is the power we have received as the People of God, namely the Holy Spirit moving among us, revealing opportunities to us, and giving us the strength and resources to take on one more outreach/mission project. Rather than getting fatigued, we are energized because we are expending ourselves not in self-service, but out of love of God and neighbor. Our strength is God's strength. Our resources are God's resources. Our mission is God's mission.

And every member of the parish is invited, indeed is called, to be a part of this moving out into the world in love and service. Every one of us can surely find in the vast array of outreach and mission that we do, at least one project that is calling them to respond and to engage. You will find that you receive much more that you ever give.

Thus for us today, is a true Pentecost, which is a lot more than colorful balloons. It is a gathering of God's people to hear the good news of the coming of the Holy Spirit among us. It is a proclamation that the Spirit still abides with us and enlivens us. It is a renewal of our spirit as a parish to continue to do God's work in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Amen