



Pentecost is When?

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Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23

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Pentecost Sunday, which follows Ascension, which follows Easter, which follows Lent. The narrative of ritual and tradition by which we tell the story of this faith lineage with which we are aligned. The story that reminds us of who we are. The family story that may or may not have happened exactly this way but nevertheless is true. Nevertheless, reminds us of who we are as family, as gospel enlivers in this place, in our time.

At this juncture of the story, at Pentecost, a community is gathered, a community of “devout people living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven.” They hear a sound as of a rushing wind from heaven and assemble. They witness an event that bewilders, astonishes, amazes, disturbs them. It’s a particular community of devout people, in Jerusalem, people of Jewish lineage. Looking back, we learn they’re gathered not by chance but for a festival of their faith lineage. The festival of weeks. The second great feast in Israel’s annual cycle of holy days. Originally a harvest festival it had become a day to commemorate the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai.

As we look back and learn, we see connectivity and continuity. This bestowal of the Holy Spirit, divine breathing into and of life happens into a story, not a void. Prophetic words from Joel, from Peter’s Jewish context, interpret, make sense and meaning of what’s taking place. The church claims this bestowal of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as something new. New revelation, superior to anything before. But let’s consider, understanding of what was happening required

prophetic words from a community with stories threaded through with a world breathed into life, indwelt by divine spirit and presence.

This story becomes foundational to the faith story of a religious community that emerged from Judaism. A community first named people of the Way, over time Christians, followers of Christ. Pentecost is celebrated as the birthday of the church.

On this day of Pentecost, while listening to the story again, we imagine what happened back then. What looks like drunkenness is not, Peter asserts, rather it's the fulfilment of Joel's prophetic words. Words predicting a time when the spirit of God will fall upon all creation empowering prophecy, visions, dreams, wondrous displays in heaven and signs on earth. We look **back** in linear time to locate this event, this Pentecost happening.

But where in linear time do we locate the **fulfilment** of Joel's prophecy? Do we, as Peter proposes, see Joel's prophecy fulfilled at **that** moment in history? Or do we project it into the future, see this as a "still to be fulfilled ideal"? For surely what Joel prophesies hasn't come to pass, or if it has, not in a way we understand.

When imagining Pentecost, it always seems a step removed. Surely Pentecost's not about now, not about us. Rather it happened over there, to someone else, back then. Or it's happening later. Or maybe it's nice to think about but it doesn't really make any difference to real life now. And maybe it doesn't. Maybe it's just a cool story to tell that orientates us a little differently to life. To how we understand things, what we allow as possible in the world. Perhaps we're made aware that, each breath, we draw in the sacred, the divine breath of life. What that relieves and releases in us.

The tradition through time can, like Pentecost, become a thing over there, next to us. A thing we're sort of obedient to, try to keep with integrity for that's what being faithful is about, isn't it? A tradition layered with cultural practices and habits of time can seem irrelevant and cumbersome. But maybe it's sought to be a means to communally express the story of God with us. For those who practice, participate. learn how to embody, speak and act this God

with us. Practice changes us. As we God with us is brought to life in us, God, alive in the world, is revealed.

As Christians, we benefit from Pentecost. Descendants of those newly inbreathed who, from Jewish roots, emerged as Christians. In this moment the Spirit brings the church into existence and empowers it, as it's sometimes explained. If we benefit from Pentecost, how are we **of benefit** from Pentecost?

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit breathes upon, fills those gathered. The sound of it causes all to assemble. Each and every person hears of the marvels of God in their own language. They receive it as they are, where they are. They don't need to become other than themselves to receive, to hear and to breathe. We're directed to understand this as fulfilling the prophecy made by Joel. That all of creation, each and every person from greatest to least is filled, blessed, breathed upon, gifted and empowered to express, to be their God intended selves.

Pentecost reminds us of the way things **actually are** - that each and every person and the whole of creation is breathed and breathes into being divine presence. Pentecost reminds us who we **are**, reminds us what is possible. Further it reminds us **what is real right now**, in each moment. Each breath is a bestowal of divine potentiality, and **this** is what a world that is conscious of this looks like.

We participate in structures and systems that benefit us, yet they're denying and diminishing the capacity of others, of our creation to breathe. We can, as we do with scripture, with our tradition, with Pentecost, make these issues, problems from back then, over there, someone else, for the future. We can refuse to accept that we participate in perpetuating injustice. We can talk about, perhaps even act to alleviate the symptoms of suffering. Yet do nothing to untangle, uncover the fundamental injustice of the systems that perpetuate the unjust share of resources. Because we're in the habit of living this way, because we would be inconvenienced.

Pentecost tells us our breath is intermingled, our suffering is mutual, our dignity interdependent. Pentecost may have happened, an event in time back then. But the place of Pentecost in our story, our

tradition of understanding, of God revealing to us who we are, is far more eloquent than that.

We locate our lives within a framework of lineal time, past, present, future. But for you and I the only **certainty** we have of life is right now. Humour me a moment, as you sit, as we are in this space I want you to become aware of your breathing. I want us to pause for a moment and to ask you to become aware of your breath in and your breath out. This breath in this moment, you are alive - this you can know. This breath is life in this moment.

What if this breath, in this moment, is our Pentecost? Each breath in each moment we're enlivened with divine spirit to make Pentecost real – to make this creation a place of divine blessing for the flourishing of each and all. Pentecost reveals to us the potentiality of now. Our people cannot wait. Our planet cannot wait. Perhaps this breath, this moment, this now is all we have.