

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday June 4 2017

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

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you on this Pentecost Sunday in the name of Jesus, our living Redeemer and loving Lord. Amen

On this day, long ago, it could be argued that the church of Jesus Christ burst into existence...a church of prophets and dreamers and visionaries...a church of animated testimony and bold proclamation...a church empowered to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...a church blessed by God's Spirit to be a blessing to the world.

And so it is, that on this Pentecost morning, we gather together to reaffirm our calling as the prophets and the dreamers and the visionaries of the 21st century church. We gather, because God has anointed us, in our baptisms, to reform and reshape not only the church, but also our communities and the nations of the world. God has called us to be about the business of transforming the world by actively and energetically witnessing to the love of Jesus Christ for all people.

What an honor to be called! What a privilege to be asked!

Unfortunately, we tend to sell ourselves short. We tend to claim that we don't measure up...that we aren't the kinds of prophets and witnesses that God would wish us to be. Like Moses of old, we argue that we don't have the words, that we're not articulate enough, that we can't be expected to speak in lofty tongues of mortals and angels.

But let's not kid ourselves. Fancy words and high falutin phraseology do not a prophet make. Sometimes what's needed is just plain straight talk...simple and from the heart.

I'm reminded of an old story...about a conscientious homeowner who wrote to a manufacturer of cast iron pipe, telling the company that he had found that by pouring pure hydrochloric acid down his drain, he immediately opened his grease-clogged pipes. He asked if there was any way in which the acid might be harmful to the pipes.

"The plumbing manufacturer wrote him back saying, 'Thank you for your letter. The effect of such acid upon ferrous-constructed materials is certain to be deleterious. We therefore strongly urge you to cease such activity in the interest of the future of your plumbing.'

"He read their letter and responded, 'Thanks for your letter. I am relieved that I have been doing the right thing in using the acid on my pipes.'

"Another letter came quickly from the manufacturer: 'We fear that there may have been some miscommunication in our correspondence. Acid, of that density, applied to cast iron pipe, is certain have dubious results. Therefore please desist from your current practices.'

"The homeowner read the letter, then wrote back, thanking the company for its response, telling them that he, once again, was delighted that he was doing nothing that might harm the pipes.

“Finally, the exasperated manufacturer sent a telegram to the homeowner that read simply: ‘DO NOT USE ACID! IT WILL RUST THE HELL OUT OF YOUR PIPES!!!’”

You get the point. We’re not called to be the orators of our age. We’re not called to channel William Shakespeare or Dr. Billy Graham. We’re not called to be philosophers or politicians or poets. In short, we’re not called to be anybody except ourselves.

We are called to tell the truth...as we see it...as we experience it...as we know it...the truth about Jesus. No pomp and circumstance. No artificial language. No contrived arguments. Straight from the heart...as the Holy Spirit gives us the means and the will to do so.

Though we may question our own abilities, the Holy Spirit has been breathed into us, according to John’s gospel, and this Spirit will give us the words we need and spark those words in the ears of our listeners. As was the case on that Pentecost long ago, the Holy Spirit can make powerful, energetic and convincing witnesses out of the most unlikely candidates

In my 34 years of ordained ministry, I have seen many, many ordinary saints who have been filled with Christ’s spirit and empowered to witness...every bit as well as did St. Peter whose Pentecost sermon brought 3,000 people to faith in Jesus Christ.

You have seen these people, too.

For instance, do you remember Pastor Stan Benson? He was not a polished public speaker by any means. Just a home grown boy from South Dakota who somehow landed in Tanzania as a Lutheran missionary. But Stan Benson was filled with the Holy Spirit. He had an excitement about Jesus Christ that couldn’t be corralled and he had an urge to serve God’s people that wouldn’t quit. Stan was humble, folksy and kind of rustic in manner. But he was an extraordinary missionary and his years of service in retirement here in St. Peter were filled with hours and hours of volunteer work through Habitat, Kiwanis and First Lutheran Church. Interestingly, sometimes when words failed Stan, he’d revert to speaking Swahili...and though I couldn’t understand Swahili, I knew exactly what Stan was trying to say. We all did! Talk about a powerful public witness to the love of Jesus Christ! Stan was amazing!

Or do you remember Mary Gilsrud? Mary was an old lady when I knew her. She couldn’t hear for beans; she had one of the loudest voices ever given to a human being; and her love for Jesus was evident in every coffee party she organized at Park View Manor. When Mary was in worship, she was always two or three words behind everyone else...whether it was the Creed, or the Lord’s Prayer or singing a hymn. And because she spoke so loudly, everyone knew that Mary was in the house. But, bless her heart, Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit, and no one who knew her ever doubted what was central in her life. She testified to the love of Jesus with every breath she took...and people heard the voice of Jesus in every word she spoke.

Or do you remember Harry Franz? Harry had been a coach and teacher all his life. Now, no matter how hard I try, I really can’t remember what his voice sounded like. What I do remember, perhaps you do, too...was that Harry was a world-class walker in his old age. You’d see him out on the streets of St. Peter walking for exercise, walking for fun, walking for good health. But the thing that I so vividly remember about Harry was that he would wave and smile at every single car that passed, every bicycle or motorcycle that went by, every fellow pedestrian he encountered. Harry didn’t need to say a word; his

smile and his wave said it all. Motivated by Christ's Spirit, Harry greeted and blessed everyone he encountered. And as was the case in Acts, they all heard the Gospel in their own language.

Well, dear friends, I've said enough.

I believe that Pentecost Sunday is best served by remembering that you and I are the Stan Bensons, the Mary Gilsruds and the Harry Franzs of our day. We may not be eloquent or polished, but we are blessed by the Spirit with languages all our own. And as we witness to the faith that dwells within us, we'll be surprised over and over again to learn that folks out there will hear what we have to say in their own native tongue. And they will give thanks to God for the privilege of hearing the Gospel presented honestly and authentically by someone who cares.

May God bless each of you as the Spirit gives you life and love and voice.

In Christ's name. Amen