

April 12 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Acts 4:32-35

John 20:19-31

Sermon *Pentecost Come Early*

There were no crowds, there were no prayers of anticipation, there were no fiery tongues, and there was no wind, no foreign languages, no bold preaching, and no prophetic scriptures quoting. What some scholars call John's version of Pentecost from this last passage in John 20 shortly, after the resurrection, is a completely different take of the coming of the Holy Spirit than the more familiar and celebrated version in the Book of Acts. Some commentators see these two stories as sort of diametric opposed version of this new manifestation of God's Holy Spirit. Some differentia from calling it the indwelling of the Holy Spirit here in John's gospel versus from what would be called as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. And we could have a pretty interesting discussion about that in Bible, if we chose to do that but rather than split hairs right now, let us just take a look at how John's version is different. And what possible purpose that this passage can serve for us as we move into this season, this season of resurrection, and this season of Easter.

First of all this passage in no ways connect the Jewish Feast of Pentecost with any kind of Christian celebration as the Book of Acts does, in fact the word Pentecost is not even used in this passage. Secondly this story instead connects this encounter with the Holy Spirit with two consecutive visits with Jesus to his remaining 11 disciples. The first visit was on that Easter Sunday evening and other just a week later. Third, the setting is then completely different the 11 disciples are shut up rather than an Upper room; I would call it a lower room. And actually Thomas is missing the first time so there is really only 10 of Jesus disciples present. These disciples are not praying in anticipation for a visit from Jesus. They are not praying in the anticipation of the Holy Spirit instead they are cowering; they are hiding in fear that they will be discovered and captured by those same authorities that had captured their Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is imparted in a very quiet way and personal way by Jesus himself. Four, the Holy Spirit is given to only his closet followers. No one else is present, there are no fireworks, Jesus is simply with them in a very earthy kind of way he breathes on them the Holy Spirit. It comes as I might say right out of the horse's mouth. So what then, given in this setting are we to make of the content of this passage; the word spoken and the actions taken in connection with of this appearance of God's Holy Spirit? What are we to make of Jesus' word Peace throughout this passage? How are we to see his encounter with

Thomas and Thomas's words in actions too? What does all of this have to do with Jesus word regarding the forgiveness of sins in verse 23? All I can do is giving my take on this. My take is that John's version of Pentecost shows Jesus sharing the Holy Spirit for very specific purpose and that purpose, I think, was in this case, is to comfort. In several places in the Gospel, in fact, the Holy Spirit is called what? The Comforter. And in this passage what do the disciples need more than anything else but a great deal of comfort. We have to put ourselves in the place of the disciples and imagine, the rug has just been yanked out from each one of them. Jesus was taken from their midst, the one in whom they had spent every moment for three years of their lives. And one of their own numbers, Judas, had made Jesus' capture possible. So their trust level had to be low or be at a nonexistent point. They had seen Jesus captured, tortured, and buried and just as they had gotten used to the idea of his death. What happens? The tables are turned and they were told that he was alive again. But where was Jesus? And what were they to do? Would the authorities come after themselves as well? All these questions run through their mind as Jesus himself comes into their midst. And what did he say? He said. "Peace, Peace I leave with you. Peace be with you" Peace. And what more does each of us need when the rug get pulled out from under us; out from under our families or friends, health, our finances or even our lives. What more do we need than peace. Peace in our minds. Peace in our hearts. We need a great deal of peace. And who can bring that peace into our lives better than God's Comforter; than God's Holy Spirit?

But more than that passage speaks of a peace that goes far beyond that of the people, the events and the material things of this world to our very relationship with God and our relationships with each other. And at the heart of those relationships I think is reconciliation. The ability as in verse 23 to put sin, put past mistakes behind each one of us and moving forward with clear mind and with a clean conscience. So in the midst of the chaos; in the midst of the lack of trust; in this midst of this loss of faith; Jesus brought his disciples the peace of the Holy Spirit and he offered reconciliation between us and others and reconciliations between us and our God.

But Jesus goes even further with encounter with Thomas a week after Easter. Thomas had not been present when Jesus visited the first time so he had grave doubts about all of this as we sometimes often do. He wrestled with his faith. When Jesus appeared again; was he real? Had he really been raised? What did he have in store for them? Over the years we have called Thomas, doubting Thomas. I think he gets a bum rap. But doesn't he really embody all the doubts and fears that we feel in life when the rug is pulled out from under us as well. Pulled out from under us in life and we don't know where to turn. Although he seemed annoyed, Jesus does not scold or criticize Thomas for his doubts. On the contrary he is with

Thomas in that lower room even allowing him to touch even allowing him to see that it is truly Jesus. Which leads us to that million dollar question? What purpose does this passage serve as we enter into the season of the resurrection? I think it serves simple but even more important purpose than we can ever imagine. It reminds us that when we return to business as usual in our lives and become discouraged by what life throws our way but as the disciples of Jesus. God's Holy Spirit will bring us peace. God's Spirit will bring us forgiveness. God's Spirit will bring us reconciliation one with another and with God.

And in the midst of the doubts, in the midst of fears the Holy Spirit of Jesus will walk with us showing us the way to greater and greater faith. Sometimes it may not seem much in the face of hardship or illness, mental or emotional anguish or even in the midst of death but when you think about it, most times that peace is always there to carry us. And it truly is, I think, is a winning combination that I think, will see us through this life and on to that next life to come. So Jesus said. "Peace be with you as the Father has sent me and even so I send you." Amen