

April 7 2013

Scripture Lessons

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20: 19-31

Sermon *John's Pentecost*

Well, there were no crowds, there were no prayers of anticipation, there were no fiery tongues, nor wind no foreign languages, no bold preaching, and no prophetic scriptures floating at all. What scholars call John's version of Pentecost from John 20 just shortly after the resurrection is a completely different take on the coming of the Holy Spirit. Completely different from the familiar version that we see in the book of Acts when we celebrate in about a month on Pentecost Sunday. Some commentators in fact, feel these two stories are diametrically opposed versions of this new manifestation of God's Holy Spirit. Some differentiate between what they would call as the indwelling of the spirit of God in John versus of the out pouring of the Spirit in the book of Acts. And it is kind of an interesting discussion and study. But rather than split hairs this morning, let's take a look at how John's version is different and what possible purpose this passage can serve for us as we move on into this season of the resurrection.

First of all, this passage in no way connects the Jewish feast of Pentecost with any kind of Christian celebration as it does in the book of Acts. In fact the word Pentecost is never used in John's Gospel. This story instead connects this encounter with the Holy Spirit with two consecutive visits with Jesus to his eleven remaining disciples. One visit is on the Sunday evening of Easter, and one just a week later. Third, the setting then is a completely different kind of setting. The eleven disciples are shut up perhaps in what I would call in a lower room than an upper room. And actually, Thomas is even missing that first time so there were only ten with Jesus the first time. And these disciples are not praying as in Acts, in anticipation of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, but instead of, what are they doing? They are cowering and hiding in fear that they would be discovered and maybe captured by the ruling authorities. Fourth, the Holy Spirit is imparted in this situation in this Pentecost situation in a very quiet and personal way by Jesus himself to only his closest followers. Nobody else is present. There are no fireworks. Jesus is simply with them in a very earthy way. Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit so in a way; it comes from the horse's mouth so to speak.

So what then, given in this setting, are we to make of the content of this passage? What are we to make of the word spoken, and the actions taken in connection with this appearance of God's Holy Spirit? What are we to make of Jesus use of the word of Peace throughout this passage? How are we to see his

encounter of Thomas with Thomas's words and action that day? Finally what does all of this have to do with Jesus' words regarding the forgiveness of sins later on in verse 23?

My take on all of this, is John's version of Pentecost showing Jesus sharing the Holy Spirit for a very specific purpose. That purpose, I think, in this case is comfort. Several places in fact, in the Gospels the Holy Spirit is called The Comforter. And in this passage, what do the disciples need the more than anything else but a sense of comfort; a sense of peace in their lives. Just imagine if you will how the rug has been yanked out from under those disciples. Jesus had been taken from their midst. The one with whom they had spent almost every moment of their lives for the past three years. One of their own, Judas had made Jesus capture possible. So their trust level had to be way down or even nonexistent. They had seen Jesus tortured and killed and buried and just as they had gotten used to the idea of Jesus' death; the tables were turned again, and when they were told that Jesus was alive again. And where was he? What were they to do? Would the authorities come after them, too?

All the questions ran through their minds, when Jesus himself came into their midst and he said peace, peace be with you. But what more do we need when the rug is pulled out from under us; sometimes with our family; sometimes with our friends; sometimes with our health sometimes; with our finances; sometimes even with our very lives. What more do we need but peace. Peace in our mind. Peace in our hearts. We need peace. And who can bring that peace into our lives best but God's Comforter God's, Holy Spirit.

But more than that, this passage speaks of a peace that goes far beyond the people, the events, the material things of this world, to our very relationship with God and with our relationship with one and another. And at the heart of the relationship that those are explained in this passage is reconciliation; the ability as in verse 23, to put sin and past mistakes behind us and move forward with clear minds and clear consciences. So in the midst of chaos, in the midst of a lack of trust, in the midst of a loss of faith; Jesus brought his disciples the peace of the Holy Spirit and the offer of reconciliation between us and others and reconciliation between us and God.

But Jesus goes even further in this encounter with Thomas just this week after Easter. Thomas had been not present when Jesus visited the first time so he had great doubts about all of this, as we often do and he had wrestled with his faith when Jesus appeared again. Was Jesus real? Had Jesus really been raised from the dead? What did Jesus have in store for those disciples in the future? We call him doubting Thomas, but doesn't he really embody all the doubts and fears that we feel when the rug is pulled out from under us, out from under us in life. When we don't know where to turn for help it always seems in a way, Jesus did

not scold. Jesus did not criticize Thomas for his doubts. On the contrary Jesus is with him in midst of those doubts and fears and even allowed him to touch and to see it was truly him.

Which leads to that million dollar question? What purpose does this passage serve as it leads us into this season, this season of the resurrection? Well, it is a simple but an important purpose, it reminds us as Easter wanes and we take up business as usual and we become very discouraged about the way that life goes that 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 in the midst of our doubt in the midst of the fears through the Holy Spirit, Jesus will walk with us, Jesus will show us the way to greater and greater faith. It may not seem much in the fact of hardship; it might not mean much in the midst of in the face of illness. It might not mean much in the face of mental or emotional anguish, it may not seem like much in the face of death when we think about it, most times Jesus Christ is always we have got and it truly is the a winning combination through this life and into the next life. And Jesus said Peace with you as the Father has sent me, even so I send you.
And together we say AMEN.