

PENTECOST: THE ORIGINAL EARTH, WIND AND FIRE IN CONCERT

Sermon, June 4, 2017

Pentecost Sunday

Texts: John 14:15-27; Selections from Acts 2

Like many of you here today, I shook a tower this morning.

I mean, I *took* a shower.

That is an example of a SPOONERISM. A Spoonerism is a reversal of the initial sounds of two words in a sentence, often used intentionally for humorous effect, but also unintentionally after one may let his/her mind get ahead of his/her words, or perhaps after one has been drinking too much "cofevfe." Spoonerisms are named after the nineteenth century Anglican priest and noted scholar, the Reverend William Archibald Spooner, who had a sixty year long association with Oxford University teaching philosophy, divinity and history. He had a legendary tendency to reverse the initial sounds of two words; he would often get his "tangles all worded up." He once berated a student who "*hissed my mystery lecture*," ("missed my history lecture") telling him he was "*tasting his second worm*" ("wasting his second term"). During World War I he announced to the class, "*When our boys come home from France, we will have the hags flung out* (meaning to say, "*the flags hung out*")!" At a naval review, he marveled at the impressive "*display of cattle ships and bruisers*." He once raised a toast to Queen Victoria, meaning to say, "*Three cheers for our dear old Queen!*" What he said was, "*Three cheers for our queer old dean!*" Officiating at a wedding, he prompted the hesitant bridegroom, "*Son, it is now kisstomary to cuss your bride.*" In chapel he once opened his prayer, "*Let us how our beds.*" And on another occasion during chapel, he asserted: "*Our Lord is a shoving leopard.*"

Well, in today's Gospel passage our loving Shepherd Jesus may sound a bit like a pushy predator. "*If you love Me, you will obey what I command.*" At first reading, that can sound like, "*If you really love Me, you'll do what I want.*" Or, worse yet, "*If you love Me, prove it!*" I'm sure many women here have heard some version of that line from some pushy predatory paramour in your past ... "*If you really love me, you'll (fill in the blank).*" That is one of the oldest lines, by the way, usually given by someone who loves only himself (*and is usually incapable of loving another*). In my youth ministry years, I used to advise young women who heard that line to respond with some version of the following, "*Well, if YOU love me, you won't push me to violate my conscience!*" Better yet, reply to your pushy paramour, "*Well, if YOU love me, you'll let me give my Dad a call on my cell phone here and see what he thinks about this.*"

Jesus is not being a pushy paramour here. I'm convinced Jesus is not saying so much that obedience is some sort of litmus test as He is simply making an *observation*. When someone genuinely loves Jesus, it'll be plainly evident because that person delights to do what Jesus wants! When you love someone, you delight in doing what they like; you enjoy making the beloved happy. When you really love Jesus, the things that cause Jesus joy cause you joy. Perhaps this text might be paraphrased: "*If you love Me, it'll be obvious because you will find great delight in obeying Me. And it just gets better! I promise you the Holy Spirit Himself will come to you and be with you now and forever, and you will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you, and you are part of the Holy Happy Family! It's easy to tell who loves me: Whoever has My commands and obeys them ... that's the one who loves me! [And] the one who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him.*" I've quoted this before, but Evelyn Underhill once compared our obedience to our loving Shepherd to that of the sheepdog. First, the sheepdog has learned to listen to the shepherd's voice. Second, the sheepdog does what the shepherd commands. Immediately. Third, the sheepdog always performs its duties with a wagging tail ... because the sheepdog *loves* the shepherd.

Jesus continued, "*I will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Holy Spirit of truth. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*" And what we celebrate today is that this promised Holy Spirit, the Counselor promised by Jesus Himself, *came down* at Pentecost, filling the disciples

with a holy joy and enthusiasm and excitement that just blew them out into the streets to tell anyone who would hear of the grace and wonder and joy of the loving Shepherd Jesus Christ.

On Pentecost we celebrate the day the Holy Spirit of God was poured out upon all God's people. Before this day, God's Holy Spirit was only given to a select few. But from Pentecost on, the Spirit of God is with and empowering all who believe, all who call upon the name of the Lord!

Pentecost begins with the sound of a violent, hurricane-like wind. If you have ever experienced a hurricane, you know that sound is deafening, frightening, intimidating; it is louder than a freight train barreling through the station! We're told this same type of sound, the sound of a violent, hurricane-like wind, came from heaven above and filled the house where the disciples were sitting, and then what seemed to be flaming tongues of fire came to rest on each one of them. Pentecost is the day the *Earth* was filled with the *Wind* and *Fire* of heaven; pardon the pun, but this is the original Earth, Wind and Fire in concert! *(I know, I know; you're thinking "the pastor is talking about yet another band from the seventies" ... as mentioned a few weeks ago, I'm a product of my generation. Earth, Wind and Fire had mega-hits like "Shining Star," "After the Love is Gone," "Sing a Song," and "Ba de ya - say do you remember, Ba de ya - dancing in September, Ba de ya - never was a cloudy day!"¹)*

The Day of Pentecost was a Jewish holy day, so the city of Jerusalem was filled to the brim with pilgrims who had traveled from every known nation on earth. When they heard the sound of this violent wind and then heard the various languages seemingly coming out of the mouths of this ragged band of uneducated Galileans, a crowd gathered in bewilderment, wondering what in the world was happening. Each person in the extremely diversified and international crowd who had traveled there from all over the known world heard their own native language being spoken; whether it was a miracle of hearing or a miracle of speaking is not clear, but it was certainly a wondrous miracle of some sort! It was like the United Nations General Assembly where a speaker is speaking and interpreters are translating the words and transferring them to the delegates through head-sets, except there were neither interpreters nor head-sets in this General Assembly gathered in Jerusalem that day! Utterly amazed, people in the crowd asked: *"Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? What does this mean?"*

Good question! What DOES this mean? For one thing, it means God was there. There is no other explanation. The wind, the fire, the crowd from all over the earth hearing the Gospel story each in their own languages ... this was a world-changing, miraculous, divine event. God was giving birth to a new movement, a movement destined to sweep across the earth.

"They have had too much wine," some of the onlookers said. Yes, there are cynics in every crowd. But Simon Peter put them straight in a hurry. "These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!" *(I remember with fondness my late father-in-law good-naturedly guffawing during worship with us one Pentecost Sunday; he was here for Stephen's confirmation. In our responsive reading from Acts 2, when we read v. 13, "Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'" Charlie burst out laughing at Peter's response, when Peter said, "It's only nine in the morning!" That IS a funny retort of Peter, but many of us are so used to hearing that in the stained-glass voice of the somber worship service that we miss the humor.)* Peter spoke and the crowd listened and at the conclusion of Peter's sermon we are told some three thousand people decided they, too, would call Jesus Christ Savior and Lord and they joined this new movement called the church. That's what happened on the Day of Pentecost over two thousand years ago. Something miraculous, something that could only have come from God ... the chapter ends with these words, *"And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved."*

And it is my prayer this same Holy Spirit will continue to fill *this* house and all us in it with a holy joy and enthusiasm and excitement and an observable love that will convincingly demonstrate WE are disciples of Jesus Christ. May the wind of God blow *us* out into our world week after week to go tell anyone who will hear, in words they can understand, of the grace and wonder and joy of knowing and serving our Loving Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

And may God continue to add to *our* number those who are being saved.

¹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5069dnd1Yk>

And if you really have time to kill, here is a link to their greatest hits LP <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qehsJRbwZ0>