

Sermon

Sursum Corda

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, May 28, 2023

Pentecost

1 Cor. 12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

I. What a scene!

- A. People gathered from every corner of the compass — all of the then-known world.**
- B. The Holy Spirit coming down upon them as a flame.**
- C. Disciples bearing witness to the good news
AND
Everyone hearing this in their own tongue!**
- D. Pentecost is sometimes thought of as the birth of the church because on this day of Spirit-infused frenzy - the Book of Acts tells us that the number of believers rose from 11 to about 3000!**
- E. But a curious statement is made before that stunning number of 3000 is given . . . a statement about how so many came to faith.**

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart* and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers,^a what should we do?”
(Greek word is “stabbed”)

The movement of 11 to 3000 was a change of heart!

- F. No wonder scripture so often urges**
 - † **integrity of heart (Gen 20:5; Psa. 15:2)**
 - † **a generous heart (Ex 35:5, Debt. 15:7)**
 - † **To avoid hardness of heart (Exodus 7, Duet. 15:7)**

A common prayer for illumination before preaching is borrowed from the Psalms:

Psa. 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Jesus begins the new commandment quoting Moses...

Deut. 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart

II. Today I want to talk about the liturgy of communion.

A. What I observe about myself (and perhaps this is true for you too) is that I often go through the liturgy of a Sunday worship service *without working at it.*

B. Now, that is natural, I suppose. We try to make the liturgy clear and meaningful — not necessarily a trick of word-problem you have to figure out . . .

C. But, liturgy is *meant* to be work! That is, its depths are only discovered and appreciated by those willing to stay involved in the liturgy.

D. Liturgical language is “thick” and operates on multiple levels all at once — more like poetry than prose.

E. All too often, I am too tired, or distracted, or maybe just too lazy to “work” the liturgy and so I miss all but the most basic/surface meanings.

III. In the introductory lines of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving I say:

Leader: The Lord be with you. (and you reply)

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts. (and you reply)

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. (and you reply)

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

A. That middle pair of responses is called *The Sursum Corda* and derives from Lamentations 3:41

*Lam. 3:40 Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD.*

*41 Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands
to God in heaven.*

B. We come to the Table lifting up our hearts to God.

C. That is - we make an offering of our hearts.

D. John Calvin's personal motto was:

“My heart I give to you, promptly and sincerely.”

IV. We tend to be careful about giving our hearts to others.

**A. We know how risky it is to give our heart.
how much is at stake.**

**B. Sometimes we Presbyterians have confused “faith”
and “belief” with thinking the right things.**

**C. But faith and belief are matters of the heart as the
story of the conversion of 3000 on Pentecost shows.**

D. Diana Eck - theologian on faculty at Harvard

writes:

The Latin *credo* means literally ‘I give my heart.’ The word *believe* is a problematic one today, in part because it has gradually changed its meaning from being the language of certainty so deep that I could give my heart to it, to the language of uncertainty so shallow that only the ‘credulous’ would rely on it. Faith . . . is not about propositions, but about commitment. It does not mean that I

intellectually subscribe to the following list of statements, but that I give my heart to this reality. *Believe*, indeed, comes to us from the Old English *belove*, making clear that this too is meant to be heart language. To say, ‘I believe in Jesus Christ’ is not to subscribe to an uncertain proposition. It is a confession of commitment, of love.

Encountering God, Diana
Eck — Harvard Theologian

- E. Today, as you come to the Table, come bearing your heart:**
 - 1. Come with a softened heart**
 - 2. A generous heart**
 - 3. A grateful heart**
 - 4. An heart enflamed with love for God and neighbor...**

- V. Now before we come to the Table - I must say a brief word about one who has labored among us in the most heartfelt and sincere way.**
 - A. Kim has blessed this congregation for the entire length of her pastoral residency with an open, generous, willing, and warm heart.**
 - B. Many of you have experienced the depth of her “pastor’s heart,” as she has cared for and walked with you on your journey of faith.**
 - C. I speak for all the staff in saying that we have learned from Kim as she proved to be a trustworthy and reliable colleague who not only did what was needed — but did it in a heartfelt and kind way.**

D. We will forever be grateful for your time with us and we wish you well as you move to the next chapter of your ministry.

Now friends, as we come to a table set by the grace of God — let us come ready to lift up our hearts.