



Pentecost Sunday 2005

Acts 2:1-11 1Cor 12:3-7, 12-13 John 20: 19-23

Each year on Pentecost Sunday we read the narrative from Acts which describes the phenomenon known as Pentecost.

However today I will focus on the Gospel of John.

The passage begins, "Now on the evening of that first day of the week." John presents his story of the Risen Jesus as one great Sunday. The church celebrates it over forty days. This difference is important to note as it is a good example of how the collection of stories about Jesus were used in different ways by the evangelists. It is not a question of right and wrong but what the evangelist wanted us to learn from the narrative.

At the beginning of this chapter we read, "Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb." This picture of day gradually unfolding helps us to feel the import of the revelation to follow. The gradual understanding of resurrection begins like the grey half-light of the pre-dawn.

Out of the shadows of grief and confusion a new vision begins to stir. When something becomes clearer for us we often use the expression, "It gradually dawned on me."

The dawn story tells us that Mary of Magdala came to believe in the risen Lord. It was not an easy journey and it cost her many tears. It also tells us that Peter came to the tomb, but went away without coming to faith. Faith is a gift and comes to us in God's time. The other disciples like Mary saw and believed. Coming to the faith that transforms will be different for most. Again there is no adverse judgement here. God allows us to be free.

Mary leaves the garden to carry out her commission. She begins her proclamation among the disciples.

Now, here it is, the evening of the first day. This pattern echoes the story of Creation from Genesis. This is truly a story of a new creation. The day has unfolded and there has been no mass conversion but rather a very gradual process which echoes our own experience. Faith is the coming to spiritual sight and not the result of external spectacle. Very occasionally an encounter, not always of great outward significance, tips the balance between doubt and belief. We often name these times as graced moments.

The sun sinks and the disciples gather behind locked doors. When we are overwhelmed by fear external security becomes a powerful symbol. The shadow side of this fear is a lack of trust. The grace of God is with us in whatever dark hole we

find ourselves. God's peace is not just a greeting but a reminder that peace is a permanent gift.

The message proclaimed by Mary is now confirmed in the commission to the group. The extraordinary thing is that there is no testing, just love poured out. With the commission comes the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift of new breath. The breath of life becomes the creative breathe, gift to the world. As life and love is poured out on us so we pour this life out for and to others.

When we share our life, our love, our hospitality our spirit with others we are proclaiming the presence of God in Jesus among us. Part of the commission involves forgiveness. God is forgiveness, it is part of the nature of God. God requires us also to be forgiving.

The language used is a continuation of the metaphor of breath. If you let sin go, release, breathe out, it is gone. If you hold it in, hold your breath... Well to refuse forgiveness is to threaten the flow of life.

As the body is diminished if one part is out of harmony, so we as community need to attend to the "health" of the whole. Whatever gift we each have comes to full flowering in relationship with others and with our God.

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