

Sermon for Sunday 31 May 2020 @ Bethesda

Pentecost Sunday

Scriptures: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (UM826); 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 7:37-39

"All welcome!"

"All welcome!:"

How far we have come from the Tower of Babel story, in which the ancestors of the people of Israel observed the many languages among humankind, and decided God must have been uneasy @ people's desire to control the world, and so confounded their speech to keep them from climbing up to heaven!

It shows us how old the Bible is; how primitive; how brutal.

"All welcome!" That's one of the most common phrases on church signs; and how often we're challenged about not living up to it, not practicing what we preach.!

"All welcome!" How we grieved over that description at our regular Wednesday preachers' meeting last week, which Rev. Wanda Duckett leads. The murder news from Minneapolis was fresh, and, starting with a couple of white pastors, and going on to black ones, our gathering became one of those times when the Holy Spirit, as we've been describing it in recent Sunday services, moved, wept, ran all up and down in our feeling tone, respectful yet angry, questioning yet hoping, virtual and yet crowded up close and, in part, healing...

Think what I'm trying to say today. Our topic for today is a classic doctrine of our faith, rich with its variety of interpretations, never completely clear or acceptable to our public ways of speaking, or our private ways of handling thoughts and feelings.

And there I was, last Monday, starting out the week proud I'd been able to simplify my sermon title into something we might not want to leave just the way I put it ... But still, attractive and driving home a point. "All welcome!" And then came Wednesday.

And yet the sermon title, "All welcome!" for Pentecost Sunday still seems right.

If everybody's welcome, we're @ least started on the path towards what Jesus talks about when he says, "The kingdom of heaven is near." Or "The kingdom of heaven is within you," or "The kingdom of God is like..."

If everybody's welcome, why, that means we're not permanently stuck in our differences. Human as we are, we're nevertheless given the chance to grow up. Those poor people in Yemen, or Zimbabwe, who aren't home-schooling their children, or going stir-crazy @ home on top of one anotherbecause they're too poor to have our problems: They don't have the water to wash their handsand when they line up to buy their ten gallons of it, they don't have masks and the space to keep six feet apart ... so they risk getting infected by the virus!

What the dickens is wrong with us that we've gotten so capable of flying around the world, and talking to anybody we want any time of day or night, no matter where they are and we are ... and yet vast numbers of our fellow human beings can't get water to clean up while they reach for basic amounts to drink? But those are the kind of problems human beings can work ontogether!

And talk about irony! Think about it. Minneapolis: That's where General Conference was supposed to be held this month! Where the United Methodist Church was supposed to split....and we've just decided it's also where the replacement meeting, General Conference 2021, will be held ... And God alone knows what we'll be ready to do by then...turning, turning as the world is, and as we are along with the world!

These beautiful, reassuring scriptures we're given today inspire us to work things through; and they horrify us with the expense and waste of time our social arrangements are causing right now ... with a two-party political system that, instead of balance, just brings brake-lock and log-jam!

Dear God! What's the route through this jungle you've exposed to us with the world-wide weakness of our simple breathing arrangements, and with all our natural, inborn fun @ just being together, and the beauty of our singing, and our need to exercise and learn things and SHARE, like we keep telling our children to do?

And yet ... and yet ... there it is ...right there, among the first conclusions of our Jesus and his friends. They could UNDERSTAND one another ... without schooling ... no technology we'd recognize....

We'd better pray! There's something here we need to work on. There's healing we've not even analyzed, much less paid for or worked out the insurance for.

We've got a whole universe ... a ton of universes ... to explore, and to learn to cooperate in and through....

Life and death are open to new definitions ... Love itself has aspects we haven't tasted. Jesus! We could heal the world! We need this more than automobiles. We've got to stand in the corner and LISTEN to what we've been saying to each other, in the ways we've behaved, the wars we've defended ourselves in, the walls we're still building.

Like those preachers kept asking last Wednesday, "What's it gonna take?"

I don't know. It's too much for me to outline. Use your imagination. Trust. Work on it, and come back next week with some good news ...

"All welcome!"

That's all we've got now. Everything else has been destroyed.

The kingdom of heaven is here/near/everywhere.

Jesus!

"All welcome!"

Amen.