

Sermon: Be A Dancing Tabernacle**Scripture: Number 11: 24-30 and Acts 2:1-13****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: May 31, 2020**

On this day of Pentecost we hear our sacred scriptures read in Hungarian and in Mandarin, thanks to Marty and Arlene, and we can be astonished that this sacred text originally written in Hebrew and Greek has spread across this globe and been translated in over 3,000 languages! It's somewhat mind-boggling to consider that this divine revelation given to a handful of nomadic people in the Middle East – the Hebrews - and culminating in a single member of their tribe, is now the largest most wide-spread religion across this globe.

That's where we have to start to understand the import and meaning of what we call this day - Pentecost - with that nomadic tribe, or collection of tribes, back in the middle east of 3500 years ago. Everything that occurs in the New Testament is a reflection and fulfillment of what's in the Old Testament. All the images used, the references made, the language crafted, the theology referenced in the stories and writings about Jesus are best understood in light of the Hebrew writings... because the earliest followers and scribes of all that happened with Jesus were Jews and Jesus as they understood him was the continuation of the story, of the history, that they had heard and studied and prayed with all their lives - from the beginning of time in Eden through Noah and Abraham, Jacob through Moses and the prophets and to Jesus over thousands of years.

It's a breathtakingly wide swath of human history that they take into account and Jesus is THE person, toward which all of that history was pointing. And as they considered the future, He was also the referent to which it all pointed back, the fulcrum if you will of all human if not creational history and trajectory.

The scripture says that it was on Pentecost that the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem along with devout Jews from many nations and many tongues. So Pentecost was of course first a Jewish festival, that's why they were all gathered in Jerusalem. It's better known now as Shavout (shavoo-ought) or the Festival of Weeks, which our Jewish brothers and sisters are

celebrating this weekend themselves. Originally it was a harvest festival commemorating the obligation the Jews had to bring their first fruits to the temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God. When the temple was destroyed in Jerusalem, which held the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant which was the law given to Moses on Mt Sinai, the festival became an honoring of the moment of God's giving the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, with a ritual called the Counting of the Omer which is a formal count down of the days and hours until Moses received the law from God. A friend of mine, Rabbi Michael Shevack, said in a text conversation with me yesterday – "well, technically, I'm supposed to stay up studying til dawn when Moses received the tablets of the law but I'm going to bed early and do it in my dreams!"

So the disciples and many other Jews were all in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost, which always took place 50 days after Passover, but in this moment in time of the first Christian Pentecost, 50 days previous was the Passover celebration that Jesus had with his disciples right before he was arrested and crucified. The intervening 50 days were momentous in that the followers of Jesus were having mind-blowing experiences of him resurrected from the dead and appearing all over the place. But then just before the Festival of Pentecost, Jesus told some of his disciples as he spoke to them in his resurrected form that he was going to Ascend into heaven... but that he would not leave them alone rather send his Spirit to be with them, his Holy Spirit. Jesus left the density of his resurrected form at the Ascension and became present to them in all time and all places in his invisible less-dense Spirit form at Pentecost, to strengthen and inspire them so they could go forth to share the good news and spread the great love of God to all the world... which is what happened for the next 2000 years in over 3000 languages up to this very day.

But to break it down for you a little further, to do a little deeper dive here (and the diving can get pretty deep!), Marty read this passage from the Book of Numbers in the Hebrew Scriptures because there's an obvious connection between what happened at Pentecost with Jesus and what happened with Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness on their way out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

The biggest moment in Jewish history of Moses going up Mt. Sinai to receive the 10 commandments and all the laws that were to guide the living of the Israelites in relation to God, one another, and the earth itself – is a direct correlate of this Pentecost moment with Jesus. Since the Hebrew people were traveling to the promised land through the wilderness for 40 years and couldn't just stay at the base of Mt Sinai to receive God's divine guidance and dwell in his presence, they built what was called the tabernacle which held the laws and which held God's presence in a particularly defined way. They built the tabernacle to the specifications given by God – read the end of Exodus if you want to see how involved and tedious it was – and then they could carry it around with them and dwell with God through prayer and sacrifice and ceremony. Once they reached the Promised Land and established the capital in Jerusalem then they built a full blown temple to house the tabernacle , the access to God then being regulated by the temple authorities and codes of action and movement and purity so this holiest of places would not be corrupted by the human tendency to corrupt holy things.

God's presence there in the tabernacle was marked by a never dying fire, kept burning by the priests, which reflected the burning bush through which God spoke to Moses and it reflected the pillar of fire that led the Israelites out of Egypt... some suggest that the fire also represented the flaming sword of the Angel set to keep guard over the Garden of Eden once Adam and Eve were banished to the east.

Tongues of flame and fire, then, the menorah being the most common example, have profound significance in Hebrew tradition and always mark the approach to the holy of holies, the very presence of God. So at Pentecost, when it is written that divided tongues of flame appeared among the disciples, we are to immediately understand the connection to these other moment in Israelite history, especially of Moses' ascent to Mt Sinai. Just as Moses ascends Mt Sinai to receive the guidance and direction from God for God's people and comes back down with the laws for how they should live in covenant with God, so too does Jesus ascend to heaven and send down his Holy Spirit to guide and direct God's people in this

renewed covenantal relationship with Him. Instead of tablets of stone where the laws are written, in fulfillment of what the Prophet Jeremiah proclaimed, the Holy Spirit writes the law on their human hearts through the Spirit and we, the church, the followers of Jesus Christ, inspired by His Holy Spirit, become the new temple, the new tabernacle of the living God, no longer limited by stone and mortar and exacting rites of sacrifice and prayer, but built and lived in human flesh. We become a living breathing dancing tabernacle. That is what we celebrate at Pentecost!

But I want to give you an image to end with, by referring to one particularly beautiful moment involving the Ark of the Covenant which is what the whole tabernacle was built for and designed around. The account is in 2 Samuel during David's reign over Israel and it is the moment that the Ark of the Presence of God was moved into the city of Jerusalem where the temple would eventually be built around it and it says that as it was carried forth everyone was celebrating mightily with castenets, harps, lyres, symbols and sistrums and timbrels, and leading the procession, was David, the King, wearing only a linen ephod, and it says "he was dancing before the Lord with all his might!"

And so with that image before you, may God's presence dwell in you and in us together and may our lives be a living prayer, a dance, to the God of Abraham, the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, the God of First Congregational so that we may be instruments or dancers ourselves through which the divine presence is revealed on earth as it is in heaven, amen?
Amen!

Words of Welcome and Call to Worship

Good Morning Church, it's good to have you with us this morning on this holy day, this last day of May, 2020 and this celebration of the Day of Pentecost. If you're not familiar with the significance of Pentecost to us as Christians which arose out of the Jewish tradition, then you should be much more so by the end of our worship together. For those wondering, we've decided to maintain this on-line worship throughout the summer, sometimes pre-recorded like this and sometimes on zoom and then as we approach the fall we'll re-evaluate where we find ourselves in this pandemic and hopefully make plans for in-person worship gatherings of one form or another.

Over the summer, as we always do, starting June 28, we are inviting those of you who feel moved to preach to volunteer to do so! It's always wonderful to hear from our fellow community members, how the scriptures and the faith impact their lives... and you finally get a break from me and Judy always preaching at ya! Haha, I know you don't feel that way!

Next week we'll be holding worship again over Zoom so we can do communion in real time with one another and then on June 14th we have the great pleasure of welcoming 13 of our wonderful youth to be confirmed! Even though we can't do it in person, we are working to make that service very special and we hope you'll tune in.

Finally, this service is intentionally one of celebration in light of Pentecost, but I don't think it's appropriate to worship without acknowledging two heavy things happening around us. First of all, as I'm recording this, chaos is erupting in Minneapolis and racial tensions in our country are extremely high. I personally pray for those victims of racism like George Floyd and so many others, all the people in harms way there, and that these tensions will lead to a new awareness and healing of the racism infecting, as it always has, the body of our country... and then also to acknowledge all those who have died from this global pandemic; the 100,000 in our own country and over 350,000 across the world and for all who encircle those who have died and are grieving. There is a profound amount of grief upon our little globe right now. Lord, hear our prayer...

Come, ye who are weary and heavy laden, Jesus says, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest for your souls. May this time of worship be restful and restorative to you even as you make room within yourself for God's Spirit to dwell anew in you. Come, let us worship together...