The Feast of Pentecost All Saints’ Church

May 24, 2015 Year B

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-37 John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer.

Pentecost is about Reversals.

What was once, is no longer. What was doomed has been redeemed. What was desolation has become restoration. What was dead has come alive.

Peter is preaching about visions and dreams and hopes. He is no longer sinking in water too deep for him to navigate. Peter is preaching in the center of the city square- on the steps, facing the tongues of the world.

He is no longer sealed away in a locked room, isolated and alone, frightened for his very life. Peter is preaching Christ crucified, Christ resurrected. He is no longer denying his Lord as the cock crows. Peter is preaching about the grace of God’s forgiveness and the power of God’s love. He is no longer held in by the guilt of his weaknesses, fears, and limitations.

Peter is moved by the Holy Spirit. He is alive, twirling within the wind of God’s presence; and, as the tongues of fire descend upon the tongues of the world, no one will ever be the same again. The incarnation of God’s spirit is no longer limited to Jesus.

They and we have become a new creation. Their very bones have come alive! And so have ours. God’s spirit dwells in all of us!

There are two miracles- the miracle of tongues and the miracles of ears. Both have received the Word of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God became flesh, and now the Word of God becomes our flesh. We are alive, just like the world, with God’s Spirit. What was once, is no longer.

Such a reversal!

The Tower of Babel comes crashing down. Our talk becomes comprehensible, understood, and celebrated. A new creation is afoot: The creation of the world, the creation of Jesus, and now the creation of us, alive with the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is a time to remember times when we have felt the Spirit of God descend upon us. Pentecost is a time to remember when words have become flesh.

I remember a time of a powerful Reversal, when words became flesh.

I was living in New York City and teaching an introductory Bible course to high school seniors- a class no one wanted to teach, and no one wanted to take. I was new on the faculty, so it was mine to tackle. It was a hot September afternoon. School had only been in session a couple of weeks. It was near the end of the day. My voice was tired, I was feeling drained. I didn’t know my students very well. The air conditioning wasn’t working. I was writing some notes on the board about Abraham and Sarah and the birth of their son, Isaac, when the students started to give me a bad time.

“You don’t really believe this stuff, do you, Ms. Hamilton? My God, they were over ninety years old! Yeah, right, they had a kid! What a stupid miracle anyway. Who cares? Just two dried up people, in a dried up desert having a dried up kid.”

I tried to ignore their comments, but I could tell they were getting to me. Their questions felt like fingernails running down my chalkboard. How much of this did I believe in anyway? How did I understand the Bible in terms of my own faith? I thought to myself, “No wonder no one wants to teach this class. What was I thinking of to expose my faith to a bunch of smart, smart-alecky adolescents?” I kept on writing. Finally, a student asked me, “Do you believe in miracles, Ms. Hamilton?”

“Yes, I do,” I answered, with my back still to the class as I continued to write on the board.

“How can you believe in miracles?”

“Anyone who has worked as a chaplain on the Burn Unit at New York Hospital, as I have, has seen miracles.” The room was silent. I was relieved. But then, I realized that it was too quiet. I turned around and faced the class for the first time that day. “What’s up? Something just happened.”

And then a student who hardly had spoken a word in class for two weeks said, “I have been burned. I lived on that Burn Unit for nine months.”

For the first time, I realized he was the only one in the room with a long-sleeve shirt on, with the top button buttoned. “Nine months; you were burned badly.”

“Yes, most of my chest, and arms, and thighs. I was caught in a man hole cover explosion on the street.”

“Oh my God, you’ve been through hell, and back again. May I see the work done on your arm?” With that he rolled up his sleeve. We talked about the grafts and the pain and the nurses and his surgeon, Dr. Madden, who was also called Dr. God. While we talked, I ran my hand over his arm admiring how well his body had recovered and the beautiful work done by his surgeon.

“My doctors said, I’d never be able to run again.”

“Yeah, and now John is the Captain of our soccer team. And he’s fast.”

I’d been so caught up in examining John’s skin grafts, I hadn’t noticed that all my students had encircled us. They, standing in witness to his courage, truly loved him. Then the bell rang; our conversation ended.

The next day in the hallway, I ran into John’s mother. She introduced herself to me and said,

“My son has never talked about his burns with anyone. He has kept so much within himself. And last night, he told me what happened in your class. It meant so much to him that you touched his burns, and that you were not repelled by them. In fact, you thought they were beautiful. For the first, he told me how he had felt, and I told him about my feelings and we talked late into the night about the whole ordeal.

“Believe me, it’s a miracle.” And with that, she began to cry.

“You’ve been keeping a lot in, too,” I said. And with that I began to cry, because of course, I had been keeping a lot in, as well. And so we stood in the middle of the hallway crying.

Will these dry bones live? Oh yes, says the Lord. I the Creator Lord will open all your graves and raise you up and bring you back to the living.

Reversals. What was dead is now alive. What was bare bone is flesh. What was hopelessness and fear is love and grace. What was isolating has transformed into the beloved community.

Pentecost, the Feast we celebrate today, is simple in its profundity-

And this is it: Jesus’ wounds heal us so that we in turn can touch and love and rub each other’s wounds into God’s glory.

AMEN

(the Rev.) Jamie L. Hamilton