

We've just read the story of the church's first Pentecost: the arrival of God's Spirit, fire and noise, and the crowd; and all these languages being spoken- and heard- which, instead of chaos, brought order and understanding. And then, Peter's sermon, and the people's response. So, on this day as we remember those remarkable Pentecost events, we know this is a great day for a baptism; just like then, 3,000 were added, and today we add one more.

Now, regarding this sermon title, I don't mean to be insensitive or uncaring about the heart procedures some of you have had. I know there must be a real sense of fear and uncertainty when you confront any one of the many things that can go wrong with that essential organ. It's just that the hearers of that Pentecost sermon faced their own heart procedure: they were cut to the heart. My guess is, we understand exactly what that phrase means, because we've all been there. "Deeply moved," one translation has it; touched in the hidden places. But, what it means in English translation may not be what it means in the original Greek.

There are several ways to translate the verb that tells what happened to their hearts. We could say that the people were stunned or smitten- as in amazed and even struck silent; that their emotions were stirred up, their affections engaged, and

that their hearts were pierced. We see that these definitions may mean almost the same thing, but the feelings behind the words, and the responses to such feelings, would be quite different. So that some may have been astonished by this powerful news of God at work, some may have felt guilt, some may have been confused and needed more instruction to figure out this new information. At least this, I don't think we can say it was merely emotion for the crowd that day.

I think we should realize that the thousands of hearers experienced the Spirit's movement differently. Just so, do we all. We do not all respond to God's call in the same manner; we don't even hear it the same way. We have seen persons answering the altar call, singing and laughing, others running to the front of the church, and a few devastated and sobbing, barely able to stand; we've seen excitement and guilty conscience, and sometimes, seemingly unemotional responses. We don't have to respond the same way. Our scripture tells us just this: repent and be baptized- no word at all about emotion, no command to feel a certain way- and so we understand our response is to be simply this, to hand over our lives to God's grace, and God's Spirit will come to us. It may be the response of a faithful *mind*, that knows the Lord's call will bring us into an unbreakable

relationship with the God of love and life. Hearts and minds, then, filled with hope; and thus, new life added to those who give worship to the merciful God.

We correctly tie together baptism and forgiveness of sin, baptism and the presence of God's Spirit with us, baptism and salvation and eternal life. But the last lines of our reading tell us how the believers devoted themselves to hearing and learning, to fellowship and sharing and praying. The blessings and promises of baptism are not held in trust for us, to be cashed in at our last breath, or to claim when we reach the pearly gates, but are available for us right now, and available for the purpose of bringing God's people together, for building up God's people, and for making us one people.

Baptism is the beginning of a new life, but not simply a personal relationship with "Jesus my Lord," rather a personal relationship with Jesus who is Lord of the person next to me in church, and Lord of the person on the other side of the building whom we may sometimes try to avoid; Jesus is Lord of the person on the other side of the tracks; Lord of the person on the other side of the ocean. Baptism is the beginning of new personal relationships with other people. The confession we make about him means we accept the responsibility of life for and with others.

And so, baptism unites us, not just we who are in this place, but unites us with all who confess him, as the one who is Lord and who died for us all. And for that, this is how we must live: in gratitude and joy, and in sacrificial friendship with every person this Lord has called to himself.