

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Pentecost/Confirmation
Acts 2:1-21
June 8th, 2014

“When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.”

This Day of Pentecost was a festival commemorating the fifty days after the Passover Sabbath. God’s people gathered in Jerusalem for this feast, as it was common to do so. But this Day of Pentecost would be different, of course. This day rushing wind filled the house where the disciples were sitting and the Holy Spirit rested upon them. On this day the believers acquire the names of “Church” and “Christians” – names we are familiar with, and describe us, today. Names call us something specific and they identify who we are – and even *whose* we are.

I can say now, starting with this confirmation class, that I have been privileged enough to hear the names that were given – for the first time – to most of the kids in the confirmation class, at their baptism. Traditionally, the Christian child was called by name – given their name – at Baptism, and now I have been around this place long enough to witness their baptism and then preside at their confirmation. Only one of these confirmands did I baptize – Brayden with his two cousins, Abigail and Sydney... and they were my first. I think all this means that I’m starting to get old.

When these kiddos were baptized, I had just one son about 2 years old. Now I have a 16 year-old who is driving (and making mom and dad nervous) and a 13 year old who is in his last year of middle school. When they were baptized I had hair. But since then, these kids and their parents have affected my hair follicles to the point that they no longer produce a full head of hair – actually, genetics might have played a big role in that one. My, how time flies. Times do change.

Here is another day – a day to remember. Confirmation Day. Another new day is at hand, whether it is Confirmation Day or just a different day. This is a great day, a new day, a day of a new beginnings. For the disciples gathering in a house on Pentecost that would be filled with the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit – called the Church – called Christian. But also for us today. Not called Christians for the first time. Not baptized for the first time or even baptized again... but rather new in Christ, a new life in what Christ has given us each day... new forgiveness... a new start... a new beginning. Our beginning is right now.

Beloved, we will call this Festive day of Pentecost our New Beginning Day. We have a lot of new beginnings – and in each day, we start anew for sure. We need this new beginning because each day we sin and we are sinners. Each of us are called to a holy life but we don’t live what we are called to be. We would much rather live the old life of death – the old life that rewrites the old story of our brokenness. The old sins that we can’t shake – or perhaps – desire not to shake. In sin, there is nothing new. We prefer the old way that has bogged us down at times because it’s what we know or what satisfies our needs. We prefer to keep the new beginning at bay because “the new” means we have to change and that change – even of our behavior – will mean that what we like to do needs to change. And we don’t like to change – at least not that kind of change.

In our New Beginning Day today we call to God, and we mean it, that we desire for him to wash our sins away. In our new beginning day we begin anew with a clean slate with the

attitude that changes our ways from the old rut we have gotten ourselves into to a way of living that pleases the Lord. You see, it is from this that we live in the baptismal life that God started for us at the font – and then makes new for us each day as we die each day to sin and then are resurrected in new life in forgiveness.

Our New Beginning begins today, right now. A life lived for Christ and His Church. A life lived filled with the same Spirit that came upon the disciples on that day of Pentecost. No, we aren't going anywhere today speaking in new tongues. But we are going with the Holy Spirit on our hearts and in our lives. We are going as people called out to Service – with His Word on our lips.

You may have heard of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a Lutheran pastor in Germany during WWII who was quite vocal against the Hitler regime and eventually died in a concentration camp in 1945. On one Pentecost day he wrote his parents from prison and said, “At the Tower of Babel all the tongues were confounded, and as a result men could no longer understand one another as they all spoke in different languages. This confusion is now brought to an end by the language of God, which is universally intelligible and the only means of mutual understanding among men. And the church is the place where that miracle happens.”

With all that is confusing in the world – confusing tongues, confusing standards, confusing morals, and whatever else that confounds us – there is one language that is easy to understand. Now, the confirmation class may say that not everything that was taught by their pastors was easy to understand – and perhaps that has been your thought over the years as well (not everything is clear to your pastors either), but the Gospel is not confusing. It's very simple. God makes it simple – and sometimes we think – it's too simple, there must be a catch. There is no catch. You know how it goes... just like this... “*God so loved the world He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” That's it. God loves us so much (more than we could ever imagine – beyond understanding) that He gave His Son Jesus to die for you. The Gospel is Jesus died for sinners so that, by grace through faith, we live eternally. It's that simple.

Why would God do it? Why would He love us that much? Why did He die like that? Well, there are no good answers to those kind of questions. He did it His way, and that is the way it is.

So now when new confirmands come to the table of the Lord and receive His body and blood we know He is there because – and this is the only way we know – because He says so, giving us life and salvation. And each time you do take communion, remember your baptism – for you are a part of the Church. You are called Christian. All those names the first disciples knew and understood. No matter how many years pass, each day will be new – a New Beginning for you.

Today is your beginning – for all of us. Jesus makes us new. Confirmands, you have many days to make new ahead of you. Live them out right here in this place where the language of the Gospel is universal. It always gives life. May God richly bless you and keep you in this new day until the day He calls us home. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.