

“Amazed and Perplexed”

Introductory Words: **“We light these flames to symbolize our future!”**

Last week, we were delighted by Ryan’s sharing of his future plans. He stated that he was accepted to the MVS program, but that he’s not yet sure *where, when or what* that will mean. How about that for future plans!!

I’ve thought about Ryan’s words this week. I note in them parallels to the experience of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost 33 A.D. I note in Ryan’s words apt description of our experience as the Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship! Yes! Just as Ryan waits in expectancy, the first followers waited in anticipation of Jesus’ promised next steps. We, too, as a congregation live with many questions...but isn’t it great! And now we have graduates among us! What about that as signs of the future!

Today we celebrate with Aaron, Julia, Kyle, Shelby and Trevor the completion of important benchmarks of childhood and young adulthood – high school graduation. We celebrate with Andy on completion of his bachelor’s degree and upcoming employment with Bluffton University. We celebrate the possibilities of the future; we embrace the future as a people, trusting together in the promises of God. No matter where, when or what we’re up to, we are promised the energy, the comfort, the presence of the Holy Spirit!

Let’s return to our biblical account for this Day of Pentecost. The disciples find themselves together in Jerusalem. Ringing in their ears are their various encounters with Jesus in these past 50 days. Fresh in their mind’s eyes is the blessing that Jesus gave to them before his ascension at Bethany; his promise of the empowering of the Holy Spirit. I’ve always loved the part of the ascension story where we’re told that as Jesus is taken up from them into heaven that suddenly two men in white robes are found to be standing beside them. These men ask, I believe, with incredulity, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up toward heaven?” The poor disciples! If it isn’t enough to witness Jesus being taken by a cloud, angels appear saying, “You don’t need to stand here gawking. He’ll be back. So go home, get back into the thick of things!” So we hear that they returned to Jerusalem to prepare for the future. The disciples got busy about being a community of faith – preparing for wherever that might lead them, whenever the Spirit might come to empower them; whatever that might mean!

Pentecost: A high holy Jewish holiday – fifty days following Passover, a celebration of the first harvest of Spring; in that area of the world, a celebration of the barley harvest. (Note the beauty of the peonies on the worship table, also known in Europe as “Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost – May 31, 2009

Anita Rediger

Roses”). So as we read, “When the day of Pentecost had come...but, it wasn’t that the disciples knew that **this** was the day of the Spirit’s coming as we’ve come to know it.

They were simply gathered as were thousands of other Jewish folks and God-fearers in observance of an ancient day of celebration. People from the known world came to Jerusalem for this great festival. Who knew the Spirit would come too!

On that day, “they were *all together* in one place, when suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it *filled the entire* house...divided tongues as of fire, appeared and a *tongue rested on each* of them. They had been waiting expectantly, but still...what a surprise!

Note the language. Again and again, we read the emphasis that *each*, that *all* were involved. The account continues, *all* of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages. Others in nearby houses and courtyards heard an incredible thing. They heard the familiar tongues of their homelands. If you’ve ever traveled in an international airport it is fascinating to hear the great mixture of languages. In the midst of the voices, one is drawn to those conversations which our ear picks out as understandable. So a crowd gathered...a bewildered crowd – bewildered because the disciples words made sense to them! They could see that these folks were Galileans, yet they were speaking in languages which came from the direction of the four winds - from Rome in the west, from Egypt in the south to Mesopotamia in the north and parts of Asia to the east. The comfortable, ethnic gathering of Galileans was no longer a sectarian, sequestered group. The familiar, beckoning sound of ones mother tongue in a foreign land drew persons to their gathering. We read that *all* were amazed and perplexed. Every single one – some more amazed, others more perplexed. Some caught hold of the possibility of the moment; others sneered; writing the whole thing off as a drunken orgy!

Picture the scene! Everyone was surprised! No doubt even the ones on whom the tongues as of flame had fallen were “astonished and perplexed!” This morning gives us opportunity to also exclaim our astonishment and perplexity, to examine our amazement at the promises of God being enlivened through us and among us. This morning, let’s ask ourselves – when the Spirit stirs are we willing to welcome it or would we rather “manage it” by cynically sneering at its expression? Some who gathered on that first Pentecost scoffed. Who would ever believe that uneducated Galileans would be sophisticated enough to learn cosmopolitan languages! Blinded by what seemed impossible; these persons weren’t able to share in the wonderful question that others were considering, “What does this mean?” The coming of the Spirit did not bring answers; it brought wonderment, it brought astonishment, it opened way for new voices; sons and daughters shall prophesy, young men shall see visions, old men shall dream dreams, even persons once considered property – slaves – now have a voice in the Kingdom of God.

The Day of Pentecost – May 31, 2009

Anita Rediger

What about us on this Day of Pentecost 2009? What might the Spirit be doing in kids from rural Indiana? Trevor, Kyle, Shelby, Aaron – with what might the Spirit be teasing you? What might the Spirit be doing in young college graduates, middle-aged farmers, school teachers, business persons and retired people! What surprises does the Spirit hold for a fledgling congregation known as the Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship? For sure, if we'll let ourselves, we'll find ourselves 'astonished and perplexed!'

As I consider our fellowship, I note that sometimes I bask in the delight of astonishment; at other times perplexity speaks with a louder voice. (Andy's statement of belonging in the Tri-Weekly College News!) That's good for me, because this range of feeling reminds me – as Nelson Kraybill noted- that this movement, this fellowship does not belong to me or to us, but to God.

No matter our age; our work; our stage in life – we are invited and provided with this wonderful tension; life in the Kingdom – is known by astonishment and perplexity, by anticipation and possibility, by amazement and the promise of a future! Bernie's beloved expression, "blessed unrest!" describes it well!

Giving of candles to :

Trevor – Martin or Millard

Kyle – Melissa or Phyllis

Shelby – Marie

Aaron - David

Andy - Bernie

May these candles remind you of this time in your life – a time of astonishment and perplexity, a time of anticipation and possibility. May these candles remind you that while the Spirit fell on an entire community of people on that first day, it fell on each one, too. Each of us – as we open ourselves to the Spirit – are united into the Body of Christ.

“We light these candles...to symbolize your future, to symbolize our future, to symbolize the Spirit's future within us, among us, and beyond us!” AMEN

- To consider:
 - Easter season has now moved into the season of Pentecost. From the ashes of Ash Wednesday to the fire of Pentecost.

The Day of Pentecost – May 31, 2009

Anita Rediger

- “Pentecost sums up the gospel with simplicity and audacity: Jesus Christ offers salvation to all, and the church exists to proclaim it.” Kristin Emery Saldine in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3 p.6.