

32963 article, 6-10-10

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No Language Barrier

It's a scary world out there. There are terrorists, corrupt governments, and unprincipled leaders. We face employment uncertainty, stock market volatility, warnings about climate change, and worsening storm seasons. Concerns mount about illegal drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and illegal campaign contributions and kick-backs. We are deeply at odds with one another over what we understand to be basic moral issues and values. The world at times feels out-of-kilter. So perhaps we're ready about now to throw in the towel and head off to some remote hide-away where we can leave the chaos of life behind – along with all these troubling people with their troubling ideas and troubling behaviors! It's a little tempting, isn't it – the notion of shutting yourself away from it all?

Two thousand years ago the little group which had been disciples of Jesus felt that way. The man they considered their messiah had been arrested and crucified when he came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Passover. And though there were reports later of his resurrection, being visible and vocal followers of Jesus so soon after his crucifixion still put them in great jeopardy. So the disciples had been quietly in hiding. Not a happy ending to what had been such a promising beginning!

But just fifty days after Passover, something extraordinary happened, the ancient scripture stories tell us. A mighty wind swept among the frightened disciples, a wind they identified as God's Spirit. And as this wind touched them, they were able to speak in other languages. People from all over the world gathered around them, and they heard the disciples speak in their own language. Barriers were overcome. Differences dissolved. Divisions disappeared. Understanding flourished. And while there were the usual quota of scoffers and doubters and cynics present to question what they observed, still the wonder of the moment was remarked upon by a great many of them. There was a unity where mistrust had existed, and a mutual interdependence and appreciation where skepticism had prevailed.

We call that event of human reconciliation Pentecost. We Christians count it as the event that inaugurated the Church, and we celebrate it annually at this time of year. In other words, the Church counts as its founding moment and regularly celebrates the occasion when people's eyes, ears, and hearts were opened to one another.

Maybe then, in these days when we disagree on so many fronts with so many of the world's people, we would do well to remember the Pentecost spirit, and just what can be accomplished when we stay open and present and receptive to one another.

So we hope that when the craziness of the world these days threatens to overwhelm you and you are tempted to shut yourself away from it all, you'll find the willingness to step right out there among those you distrust and those whom you feel sure misunderstand you. Perhaps you'll be surprised, like the disciples of old, by a breeze that arises then to blow away every tension, establish unity, and provide reason to hope anew in the future. May the wind that drives out doubt and fear blow through your lives today!