

“The entire house” a sermon based on Acts 2:1-21 and John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 20 May 2018.

There has been among Christian and Jewish leaders in the United States a very strong reaction to the shifting of the US embassy to Jerusalem and to the consequent killing of 60 unarmed Palestinians by Israeli soldiers.

Why?

Certainly because of the utter tragedy of so many deaths. And because the shifting is seen to involve the usurping of religion by political powers. And yet another compromising by leaders of faith in an effort to strengthen faith's influence. A corruption of the heart of faith.

I want to talk about that in the context of Pentecost.

The New York Rabbi, Jaakov Shapiro, highlights the significance of Jerusalem for religious Jews. It is the Holy City. It does not matter who rules it, he says, whether the Turks, the British, the Palestinians, the Israelis.

Jerusalem is a Holy City and will always be so in the hearts of observant Jews.

For Jews, whether Jerusalem is a political capital is irrelevant. Just as Israel as a state is irrelevant to religious Jews. As the rabbi says, Israel is not his homeland. Israel was established by secular people. Prime Minister Netanyahu is not a religious Jew. The affirmation of Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel is a political decision. To mix this with religion, says the Rabbi, corrupts the Jewish faith. In wanting to distinguish religion and secular power, Shapiro is joined by others.

In March this year, US church leaders launched a movement calling people back to Jesus and away from branches of Christianity identifying with white nationalism and gender inequality and the millennialism that puts emphasis on Israel.

They state plainly, “Our country's leaders have co-opted the name of Jesus.”

Which brings me to our reading from Acts and the image of fire. Refining fire that burns away impurity.

The impurity that comes when add to faith or water down faith to make faith relevant or influential or powerful. As if God cannot do God's work, as if the power of Christ is insufficient to sustain the work of Christ in the world. Such alignment for the sake of power inevitably divides people. Anti-Pentecost.

Anti these words in Acts:

“Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages ...”

The entire house ... a tongue rested on each of them ... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

As if, not one of us is left alone. Not one of us is isolated. Not one of us feels excluded. Not one of us is diminished when the Spirit comes. Every one of us is drawn into the life of Christ. Every one of us is affected by the presence of Christ. Every one of us is touched by the power of Christ.

Luke links it to language.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages ...”

Going beyond our comfort zones, beyond where we feel at home, beyond our circle.

Some Australian friends have been promoting a cartoon that suggests that in the middle of the Tasman Sea there is an invisible line which when fish cross they become fush. As if only New Zealanders have accents. Surely, on one side of the line there are feesh and on the other side fush.

In the Spirit, only Christ is the norm. No other way dominates.

I heard a statistic this week that millennials feel they belong in a church when five people beyond their circle know their name.

In other words, people do not have to know the name or identity of everyone else but five people beyond their circle need to know.

The Spirit draws us into another's world, of which language is central.

In this church, native languages include Samoan, Tagalog the language of the Philippines, Afrikaans, Korean, Tuvaluan, Chinese, Fijian , English, Indonesian.

In this church are people from Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Scotland, England, Ireland, USA, Samoa, Niue, Fiji, Tuvalu, Tonga, Papua, Korea, and other countries.

In this church there are other languages – the language of Gen Z and Gen X and millennials and baby boomers and builders.

The Spirit affirms our diversity and constitutes us part of the body of Christ.

Peter quotes from the prophet Joel:

“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit.”

This is a continuing dynamic. It isn't something that happens once and for all, in one moment, at one time, somewhere in our past.

The Spirit enables us to enter into the world of others, enabling all to know and experience Christ, to be affirmed in our identity by being part of a community of affirmation.

As we are students, disciples, learners, people of curiosity, learning new languages. To speak across barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, faith, generation, culture, denomination, politics. And in so doing, as a community of God's Spirit, of the living Christ, to undermine the ideologies of nationalism and privilege and power.

Huddles stop. Windows open.

Some don't want to be part of it. “They are drunk.” “They have nothing to offer us.”

Peter though wants people to know this is what the Spirit does.

In astonishing exchanges, God breathes new life.

In a world where words divide and stereotype and diminish and judge and exclude, the Spirit builds communities where people reach towards each other across divides, where people learn each other's languages.

In the face of difference, God compelled God's people to engage. From Day One, the call was to press in, linger, listen, and speak. That people would come to say, the only thing they have in common, is faith in Christ.

Nothing else.

May it be so.



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