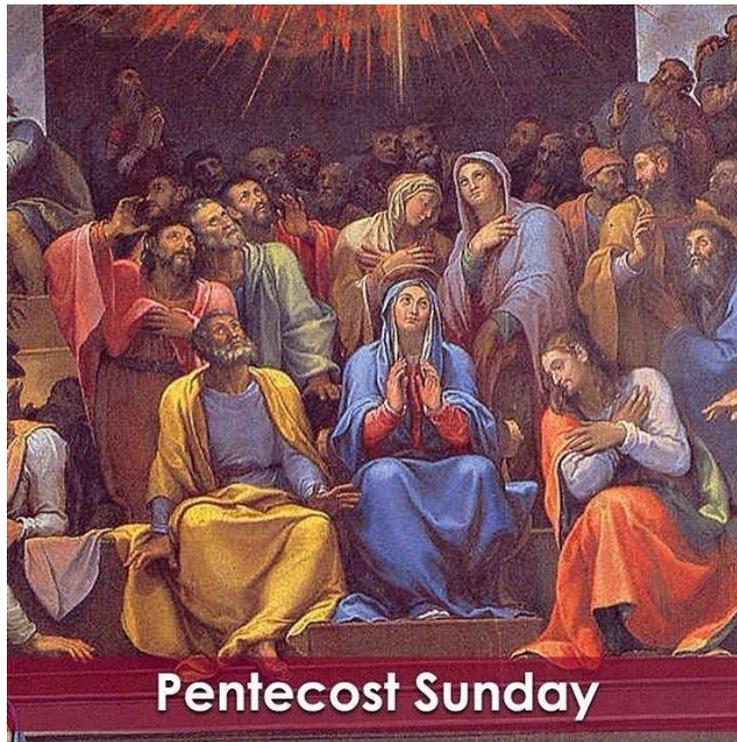


PENTECOST



The Acts of the Apostles 2:5 "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound (like the rush of a violent wind) the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? . . . -- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'"

In the fall of 2009, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut was in the middle of its previous episcopal election. Like many, I attended one of those forums, where the candidates for bishop were asked questions by members of the diocese. At the one I attended, a member of our newly formed Haitian congregation at my parish in Bridgeport asked Ian Douglas whether as bishop he would support Haitian ministry. It seemed like an easy question to answer, to simply say 'yes', of course, for who doesn't support different ministries in the Church? But Ian Douglas, then a Professor of Mission at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, surprisingly responded that he didn't believe in "adjectival" ministries! "Adjectival" ministries? What on earth did he mean by that? Well, he meant ministries that have an adjective in front of them, like "Haitian" or "Hispanic" ministry. Candidate Ian Douglas then went on to reiterate that there is only one adjective that really matters, because there is only one real ministry in the Church, it is, the 'Christian' ministry, he said, that of seeking to reconcile ALL people to God and to one another through Christ Jesus our Lord, which according to the Catechism there in your Book of Common Prayer is the stated Mission of the Church. And as Bishop Douglas has repeatedly declared since, the Prayerbook in his opinion, has got it wrong here; the reconciliation of all people to God and to each other through Christ, is NOT the Mission of the Church,

but rather *that* is, he says, the Mission of God, *that* is what God is all about in our lives, and *that* is the central purpose of God's activity here on earth, reconciliation. Bishop Douglas has insisted that the Church is invited by God to join in on this Mission, to participate in God's activity, to further the restoration of all people to unity with God and with each other; or not. It is up to us to decide whether we as Christians really wish to participate in that Mission of God. So, do we? Do we really want to actively participate in this work of God, in reconciliation? And if we do, so what are we doing about it?

For the reconciliation of all people to each other is an audacious goal. For we human beings by nature tend to retreat into our own corners, we tend to hang out with those who are like us. We usually seek haven with members of our own tribe, with our own kind, with people who look like us, who *share* our values, who speak the same language and represent the same culture and usually the socio-economic class as we do. We do not easily mix well with others. So, we often break out into our little 'adjectival' ministries. We feel safer and more secure with 'our' people. We like our little silos, and we feel protected there. But Bishop Ian's response suggests that this segregating of our churches into different 'adjectival' communities of Christians is contrary to the Mission of God. That we shouldn't have white churches or historic African-

American churches, or Hispanic or Haitian congregations, not to mention the various denominations we further divide into. We should have just 'Christian' churches, seeking to reconcile all of God's people to each other and to God. We ought not to be separating and dividing ourselves up into these different like-minded groups, if we **really** want to participate in the work of God, but do we?

For the Mission of God calls us out of our complacency, call us out from our protected spaces, calls us out from our racial and ethnic segregation, and call us out into a strange, new world, into foreign and unfamiliar places, where the 'other' lives, whose ideas and values may be very different from our own! Our Christian calling then can sometimes be uncomfortable, disturbing, even frightening at times; as it demands discipline and courage on our part to overcome our natural reticence to engage with the stranger in our midst, with the 'other,' with 'those people,' you know who I mean. And so, this work of reconciliation often takes faith on our part to engage in, because sometimes it is a scary venture, if we **really** wish to participate in the Mission of God.

And in a time when our nation is so divided, in a time when our politics is so partisan, where **is** the voice calling for unity and reconciliation in this country, where is the voice to bring us back together as Americans, the voice that is more

concerned for us as a people, as a nation, than for any particular political party or denomination or tribe? Isn't that what the Christian Church is called to do? Are we not called upon to speak up at times like these? To stand up for the acceptance of one another, for love of neighbors, for hospitality to the stranger and foreigner in our land? Did we not take vows at our Baptism to respect the dignity of every human being? Did we not promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons? To strive for justice and peace among all people? To proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Why aren't we doing that? Where is our voice?

Though the Christian Church ought to be part of the solution to this national crisis, we are instead, I fear, part of the problem. For Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words are still true today fifty years later, 11:00 o'clock on Sunday mornings is still the most segregated hour of the week for Americans. President Truman integrated the army in 1948. Brown versus the Board of Education began the integration of our schools in 1954. Redlining neighborhoods was outlawed by the Fair Housing Act in 1964. So how is it that our churches are still so segregated, so adjectival, especially if we are to be a voice of reconciliation in this land, if we are to really engage in the Mission of God. We need now to desegregate our churches. For our actions speak louder than our words, and how can we as Christians help bridge

the divide in our nation, if we ourselves as Christians are so badly divided, so segregated, gathering as we do so often on Sunday mornings only with those who look like us, and think like us, and speak the language as we do!

So then, as we worship this morning in this place, on land that was once that of the Mohicans, we need ask where are all the Mohicans now? In a town like so many that thrived as our nation's grew and prospered, we need ask what part did the institution of slavery play in our favor, and what happened to those disfavored? In a town, where the owners lived up here on the top of the hill, and the workers down there by the Depot, we need to examine what barriers remain dividing us from one another? And why is the diversity of our nation not reflected in the faces of this town?

What are the gates and barriers that divide us still? Is it the large lot sizes required for houses in our towns that often exclude minorities and the working class, or is it simply the absence of affordable housing for the poor and needy, or the lack of public transportation or needed social services, or is it simply institutional racism and class prejudice? I tell you, that if we the Church focused more of our time and our energy on confronting these kinds of questions, and less on questions of human sexuality or theological orthodoxy, then I believe the Christian Church would be thriving, that the Church would be

relevant in our society, and an important witness in the midst of our divided nation, and that we as Christians would be truly engaged in God's Mission, as an example of unity and reconciliation in a sadly divided world.

Our mission, our ministry is supposed to be breaking down those walls that divide us, removing the borders that separate us one from another, and building the bridges that unite us to God and to each other. Pentecost, this wonderful feast of diversity, of bringing people of different nations and tongues together as one, is not supposed to be something we celebrate only once a year. It is what we are supposed to be doing every day of our lives as Christians! We are NOT supposed to be retreating back into our convenient clusters of 'adjectival' ministries and congregations! We are supposed to be engaged in the Mission of the Church. We are supposed to be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation of all people to each other, and to God our Father, and not just to those who look like us, or think as we do, or who share our values and speak the same language as we do. So, let's stop pretending and get at it! Let's not just come to church, let's really be the Church, let's do the mission of God in a world and a nation that so desperately needs us to do so. **Amen.**