

The directions were simple: “wait” (Acts 1:4) But, when we think about it, there is nothing simple about waiting. We get anxious, nervous and tension fills the air. It may be even harder to wait today with so many options and so many things we have to do or could be doing. What do you do while you wait? Read the old magazines? Play games on your phone? Pace? Some of the disciples had already gone fishing with no success until Jesus had shown up. Peter suggested that they find a successor to Judas and they prayed and cast lots. And, they waited. They waited not sure what they are waiting for, a promise, a comforter, a guide. How will the Spirit come and how will it enable them? What will mean to them? To us? They waited.

Now, the day of Pentecost comes. About 120 of them are gathered in an upper room (Acts 1:15 gives number of believers). Where did these 120 come from? There are more than the 11 disciples (12 with Matthias). Remember, Jesus had more than the twelve disciples following him, in Luke 10:1 we have Jesus sending out seventy (70). The movement was greater than we are often taught, unnamed men and women who were ready to be a part of God’s plan. United in hope, purpose and prayer they had gathered and were waiting for the Promise.

The promise is a uniting Spirit:

The Spirit of Truth (John 14:17) - The truth is that God is love

The Spirit of teaching/remembering (John 14:26)

The Spirit that always points away from self to God/Jesus (John 16:13)

The indwelling Spirit - (John 14:17) “He indwells in you.”

It is a Spirit that unites us as one in Christ. It is this Spirit they were waiting for.

They waited. It was the Festival of Weeks, one of the three required festivals of the religious year (Ex. 34:22). Jerusalem would be filled with pilgrims from around the world. It was 50 days after Passover and it was a day to celebrate the end of the grain harvest. It was a day of solemn joy. Men would dance around the altar while Psalms 113-118 would be sung. They would thank God for the completed harvest. The city would be in celebration mode - the world had gathered in Jerusalem.

This was the day the Spirit came. As they prayed and waited the Spirit comes with the sound of a great wind and what seems like tongues of fire come on them. Peter sees this as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. All of those gathered in the upper room are empowered: young/old, men/women, sons/daughters. Imagine the shock of women sharing in the coming of the Spirit. They leave the upper room and head out to the streets proclaiming the message of the Christ. The Message asks simply, “What’s going on here?” (Acts 2:12).

Peter, the fisherman, rises to speak. He tells the prophecy of Joel and the message of Christ. The news of Jesus and his death and resurrection were probably still being told around the city. The leaders have tried as hard as they could to silence and delete his memory. The message comes with power - each hearing in their own language. The Word is for all people. The foundations of city shakes - almost like the walls of Jericho falling - the Spirit has come. The Promise is here!

The Church begins - the waiting had ended, Pentecost had come. They were untied together. 120 believers waiting, praying, discerning. 120 believers empowered to bring the message of God’s love to the whole world. 120 believers (men and women) moving from the shadows out to the public square proclaiming the faith. 120 believers united in message and purpose. 120 believers out to change the world.

They were united in diversity. They were able to give the message in the languages of those gathered in Jerusalem. All were able to understand the message clearly. Even when we learn another language it is often hard to completely understand it. I recall a young man in the Philippines telling Diane, “Yes, I speak English but not your English.” It is hard when the language is not your native language. There are differences in words, meanings and how one word translates into another language. I am reminded of this almost weekly as I work with the Wings kids. Especially when they come across a word that has more than one meaning and more than one way to pronounce it. For example: lead. “I will lead you.” “Get the lead out.”

Diane had an Indian couple as neighbors in Chiang Mai. They were in Thailand learning English (far cheaper than coming to the US). They would come over and ask questions about words and meanings. One of their assignments was to translate some American idioms. The one I remember was, “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps”. They had no idea what that meant.

On the day of Pentecost those in Jerusalem were hearing the Good News in their own language. The barriers and confusion of Babel has disappeared. The message came in a way that all could understand. They are enabled to become one in Christ. The unifying Spirit of Christ came in power. The Good News is simply shared: Christ came, Christ loved, Christ died and rose again. Amazing how complicated we can make simple things with theology — the Word is simple: Come and be united again as one with the Creator.

As we again celebrate Pentecost and the indwelling of the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of Grace, may the prayer of Jesus be fulfilled in this place - that they may become One. John 17:11, “That they (we) may become one...” Amen.

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1985
NRSV, Division of Christian Education, NCC, 1988