

Putting Us All Back Together

Pentecost: June 4, 2017-06-05

Today, the Christian Church the world over celebrates Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit. Fifty days after Easter, after Jesus had appeared among his disciples and then ascended into heaven, the disciples were gathered once again in the upper room. Then, just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit descended upon them as a rushing wind and tongues of flame.

What I believe we are called to focus on today, though, is the second half of our scripture text, the portion in which we are told that there were people from every known nation gathered, and they were all able to understand what the disciples were saying, even though the disciples were all Galilean. Most often, when scripture scholars engage this text, they talk about it being a reversal of the tower of Babel. In the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis, we are told that God confuses human beings' speech, so that they will have to rely on God, not their own pride. In Pentecost, then, God sends the Holy Spirit to bring us back to understanding one another, back to working together in harmony.

Friends, perhaps more than any other gift of God, right now our world needs this gift of the Holy Spirit, needs to allow the Spirit's wisdom and courage and right judgment and understanding to infuse all that we are and all that we do. We need our households and our schools and our businesses to be dripping with compassion and the building of relationships with those who are different. We need to hold our politicians and all of our leaders to embodying the highest standards of healing. Exacerbating division, demonizing the other, creating further conflict is not God's way, is not what we are called to.

Nicholas Kristof, in an opinion piece in the New York Times after the slaughter of the men standing up for the young Muslim women on the train in Portland last weekend wrote, "What the three men in Oregon understood...is that in a healthy society, Islamophobia doesn't disparage just Muslims, racism doesn't demean blacks alone, misogyny hurts more than women, xenophobia insults more than immigrants. Rather, we are all diminished, so we all have a stake in confronting bigotry."

Kristof goes on, "One thing I've learned in my reporting career is that side by side with the worst of humanity, you find the best. The test for all of us is whether we can similarly respond to hatred and nihilism with courage and, in the dying words of Namkai-Meche, with 'love.'"

In an effort to convey just how adamant our faith is on this matter, I have asked three church members to read a selection of scripture passages that have to do with how God tells us we are to deal with the strangers in our midst. And so I invite Paco Espinosa, Gail Carels, and Joey Taylor to come forward to offer those scriptures. Those of you who are interested in a list of these scripture texts will be able to find them along with the text of this sermon on the church website early this week:

Biblical Texts on Immigration, Refugees, and the Stranger

Gen 12:1–3: The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” *Abraham: the world’s first immigrant.*

Gen 15:13: The LORD said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs.” *The Israelites were strangers in Egypt.*

Gen 23:3–6: Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.” And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, “Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.” *The Hittites modeling the appropriate behavior toward a stranger in their land.*

Exod 12:49: There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you.

Exod 22:20: You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exod 23:9: You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

Lev 19:10: You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. *The stranger as a vulnerable class, and therefore in need of special legal and social protection.*

Lev 19:33–34: When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Lev 25:23: Thus says the LORD: The land is Mine; you are but strangers residing in it with me. *The Israelites, even when settled in the promised land, are still strangers themselves. Know where the true power lies.*

Num 15:14–16: There shall be one same law for you and for the resident stranger; it shall be a law for all time throughout the ages. You and the stranger shall be alike before the LORD; the same ritual and the same rule shall apply to you and to the stranger who resides among you.

Deut 10:16–19: Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. For the LORD your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the

mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing them with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. *God as the one who fights for the stranger; our care for the stranger being a case of imitatio dei.*

Deut 24:14: You shall not abuse a needy or destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land.

Deut 24:17: You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless.

Deut 24:19-21: When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

Deut 26:5: You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: My father was a wandering Aramean.

Deut 26:11: You shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

Deut 27:19: Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

Isa 1:17: Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice. Aid the wronged.

Isa 11:6: The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. (*The word “dwell” here is the same used for residing as a stranger.*)

Isa 16:3–4: Give advice, offer counsel. At high noon make your shadow like night: conceal the outcasts, betray not the fugitives. Let Moab’s outcasts find asylum in you; be a shelter for them against the despoiler. *Explicit instructions regarding the treatment of refugees from a foreign land.*

Jer 7:6–7: If you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt—then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time. *Remaining in the promised land is not a given; it is dependent on not oppressing the stranger.*

Jer 22:3: Do what is just and right; rescue from the defrauder she who is robbed; do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; commit no lawless act, and do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place.

Ezek 16:3: Thus said the Lord God to Jerusalem: By origin and birth you are from the land of the Canaanites—your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. *Recognize your ancestors were immigrants.*

Ezek 47:21–23: This land you shall divide for yourselves among the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as a heritage for yourselves and for the strangers who dwell among you, who have begotten children with you. You shall treat them as Israelite citizens; they shall receive allotments with you among the tribes of Israel. You shall give the stranger an allotment within the tribe where he resides—declares the Lord God. *Ezekiel's eschatological vision, in which those immigrants who have chosen to be part of Israel, who have intermarried—the Dreamers—shall be treated as citizens, even receiving allotments of inheritable property.*

Ps 146:9: The Lord watches over the stranger.

1 Chr 29:15: We are sojourners with you, mere transients like our fathers. *Immigrants once, immigrants always.*

Matt 2:13–14: Now after the magi had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt. *Jesus, like Abraham, was an immigrant – and even a refugee from political persecution.*

Matthew 5:1-11: When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matt 25:31–46: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when

was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Luke 10:29-37: But wanting to justify himself, a lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Rom 12:13: Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Eph 2:14, 19: For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

Heb 11:13–16: All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, God has prepared a city for them.

Heb. 13:1-2: Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without realizing they were doing so.