

## PENTECOST: "THE HAPPENING"

It was a happening, that first Pentecost in the upper room. Speaking in tongues, flames of fire—they say three thousand people were converted that day to Christianity. It's what the kids used to call a "happening," the kind of thing that seems to happen once in a lifetime, and I am fortunate, because I've had more than my share of "happenings."

For instance, I had the great privilege of celebrating the Eucharist in the "upper room" in Jerusalem. This was the very place where the disciples—soon to be Apostles—were. It is one thing reading about something, but it is another being there. You can almost picture the disciples of Jesus huddled in that spacious room holding endless, perhaps frantic, discussions about what to do since the Lord had ascended. How to carry on without His leadership? What was it that Jesus had promised? What was the Advocate? Someone once likened the discussion to a vestry meeting at which he had been asked to do the impossible with so few resources.

Jesus had told them to take the message of the good news and spread it everywhere in the known world. But they had little experience of the known world. They were sort of like the little boy from the Main Line I heard about who, upon being asked to recite the Lord's Prayer, began with, "Our Father who art in Devon." They were local people, not world travelers. Just to be in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost was enough of a happening for them.

They were commanded to spread the Gospel, but they weren't sure what the Gospel was. Simply put, it was a call to revolution. The power to love and liberate people from the things that bound them: hunger, disease, poverty, and even death. Jesus even told them that they had the power to forgive sins.

So, with my little entourage of Episcopalians, I stumbled into the upper room where two groups were already there, planning a Eucharist. I asked if we could join them, in that holiest of places, when their priest whispered to me that he had laryngitis and asked if I would mind celebrating. Would I? I could imagine the disciples looking at one another, asking Could I, Would I, Should I? The answer to that was, I could do nothing else, and I was excited to do it.

I was a little worried about the fact that the government of Israel at the time, being a theocracy, made it against the law to celebrate a Christian service in the upper room. I could have been arrested, but then again, those who celebrated that first service were all Jews and they could have been arrested also. As a friend who was a Rabbi once said to me, "It is our faith that unites us and it is a shame that it is our religion that separates us."

The disciples didn't have our excuses for avoiding the subject of our personal faith. The Jews loved to talk about religion and the gentiles found

the subject equally compelling. Unlike most of us, they were not shy in those days about their faith. They couldn't come up with bashful talk about religion being private and personal, or about having no right to force our religious opinions on others, or leaving that sort of thing to the Bible thumpers. We have become a nation of religious cowards. Are we embarrassed? Mind you, we have no similar qualms about boring everyone else to death about our politics, but bring up religion and we are afraid to offend someone. It never seems to occur to us that if **SOMEONE** hadn't talked about religion, we wouldn't be Christians today.

Grant you, the moment was right. There were Jews from all nations because it was the Jewish law that all males under the age of 30 come at least once a year to Jerusalem to make sacrifice. We have a list of who was there: Medes, Elamites, Jews from Cyrene—I dare say, anyone who could travel on foot. Language problem? No, they each heard the Gospel in their own language.

These were people like us on that day, in the upper room, huddled for fear of the Jewish authorities, but I didn't know if I would ever be there again, so I celebrated. It was a great happening for me. There is a power in a happening and those impossible plans given to the disciples by Jesus worked. Out into the street they ran shouting aloud the great news of Jesus Christ. They were so enthusiastic that the people thought they were drunk. And they were drunk, drunk on faith and courage as never before.

I must say most Episcopalians don't want to get drunk on faith. It seems highly suspect. Oh, we have faith or we wouldn't be here, but we are sort of like the poker game in the cowboy movies; holding our cards close to our vest so no one can see what we are holding. Most of us spend our lives trying to be rational, sensible, and, above all, in control. Isn't that a picture of "God's frozen chosen"?

This is a time when the little neighborhood churches are disappearing. The mega churches, of some nondescript, feel-good theology, are replacing those churches that ministered for so long to the people in impoverished neighborhoods. The "prosperity Gospel," you know, is be right with God and God will make you rich, white, and powerful. And for some that is the plan. It's all about the money and the social status. We have meetings about what to do for the poor and that's good as long as we don't have to be with the poor.

Well, I tell you, for survival, it's time to get drunk again, not with alcohol but with the same spirit of God that built the church in the first place on the day of Pentecost.

I'll teach you a word—some may know it already—and it is an Aramaic word. The word is "Maranatha." It was a greeting that Christians gave to one another. It means, "Come Lord Jesus, come." Maranatha—come Lord Jesus, come and fill us, Maranatha.

Amen