

## **DAY OF PENTECOST | MAY 28, 2023**

ACTS 2:1-21 | PSALM 104:24-34, 35B | 1 CORINTHIANS 12:3B-13 | JOHN 7:37-

39

Each month during the academic year, the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN where I work hosts a meal for faculty and staff called

“What Nourishes You?”

At each meal, a different faculty or staff member is invited to answer that question

“What Nourishes You?”

As a way of thinking about and starting conversations around the central motivations of each of our lives.

The meal is attended by about 12 other staff and faculty who listen and respond to the invited speaker’s thoughts.

At our May lunch, we were led by an art professor at the college - Michon Weeks - whose main medium is egg tempera paint and wood canvases.

In the conversation she started with those of us gathered that day, she told of her artistic practice and the meaning that it brings to her life and

She spoke about her travels with students through Italy this last January telling us of the way in which she looked closely at each painting she saw -

Noticing a detail - a “relic” as she called it - in each painting that she wanted to bring home.

She spoke of returning home and painting a number of pieces featuring her interpretations of each of these relics - inspired by the Medieval to Renaissance artists she had seen.

One of the paintings that caught her imagination is Duccio’s depiction of the day we just heard about in the Acts of the Apostles -

Pentecost.

In Duccio’s original painting, the disciples sit across the foreground of the canvas while red lines - seeming like lasers to a modern eye - descend from above as flames of fire alight on the disciples’ heads.

It was these flames - described as tongues in the Biblical story - that caught Michon’s attention as she looked at this painting -

So much so that she re-created this relic in a painting called Tongue.

In her painting a red grooved rectangle fills the foreground of the painting with a black background.

It is almost like being zoomed in on the flames that sit above the disciples' heads.

The thing that struck me as I looked at these two paintings next to one another is the way in which Tongue takes this "relic" from the Duccio painting and, in focusing in on it, gives us a fresh experience of the original story.

This new experience in the painting Tongue is, in many ways, a very sensual one.

The texture of the tongue in the eponymous painting seems like that of corrugated metal, which you can almost feel looking at it.

The starkness of the black background and the red tongue creates a contrast that stands out to the eye.

The wood canvas has real weight to it and a grooved edge like an icon of old.

While you can no longer smell it, you can imagine the aroma of egg mixing with oil and pigment to create the red and black paint.

The experience of this painting is one known through all bodily senses.

Which I believe is actually an amazing way that this painting teaches us something about the story of Pentecost.

Because the story we have just heard from the Acts of the Apostles this morning describes action and vision that engages and teaches through the bodily senses of the early disciples.

The disciples first hear the Spirit arrive -

There is a rush of a violent wind.

And they feel the presence of the Spirit amongst them as the wind that they heard fills the home where they are.

They see the presence of the Holy Spirit as divided tongues - as of fire - appear among them and rest on their heads.

And - in utter amazement and astonishment - they hear people speaking, speaking in languages not their own.

Speaking a vision of God's acts in the world - God's acts of power.

And as is so often the case with a highly sensual, emotive experience - the people gathered -

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People from all over the known world - from as far east as modern-day Iran to as far west as modern-day Italy to the northern part of Africa -

These people gathered don't quite know what to make of it -

There is confusion and amazement, doubt and perplexity.

So it is into this mix of sensual stimulation and emotional reaction that Peter speaks -

He speaks to what

The hearing

The feeling

The seeing

The speaking

Point to -

What is being mediated through this experience of the senses.

And what it points to is visions and dreams -

The visions and dreams of God -

Embodied within the people gathered there -

These gathered people who in all their religious, geographic, and linguistic diversity learn about these dreams and visions through their senses -

In ways and with words so that they may know what they experience.

The embodiment of this gathered crowd - in its diverse particularity - points towards the content of God's dream and vision for the world.

Because God's dream and vision for the world includes everyone -

No matter where they are from

What language they speak

Whether they have heard of God's dreams and visions many times

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Or if this is the first time they are hearing of them -

They are invited into this experience.

They are invited to experience the dreams and visions of God known to the disciples through Jesus Christ -

Who just weeks before - as told to us in the Gospel of John - had shown the power of life over death, faith over fear -

Rising from the dead and appearing to the disciples in a room locked because of fear.

They are invited to experience this vision of faith and life unbound by the power of death or fear.

They are invited into the peace of this way of life that makes space -

Space to be exactly as they are -

Human, prone to error, but met with the forgiveness that they each show.

And they are called - sent

Out in to the world

To proclaim the dreams and visions of this new life that they experienced through their senses, in their bodies, in community, this day of Pentecost.

2000 years later, we are the ones to whom God's dreams and visions have come -

Heard and told by those who were invited into the powerful grace, forgiveness, and life of this dream that day

On down through the ages until one day for us

God's dreams and visions were made real, alive, for us in the words we heard,

In the things we saw and felt

In the ways we were known, loved, included, forgiven, and united with all people in the body of Christ -

The embodiment of these dreams and visions on earth.

It seems an especially appropriate day to speak of God's dreams and visions as we were witnesses this morning to the baptism of Jonas Einar.

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Because - as is true when any new child arrives in a family - Jonas's arrival a year and a half ago was one filled with dreams and visions.

Dreams and visions of who he will be

Of what he will do

Of the love that he will receive and give

Of the people and purposes and places and practices that will fill his life

Dreams and visions lived out in the particularity of who Jonas is and who he is becoming.

Dreams and visions that stretch into the future of Jonas's life.

But today we primarily gathered to name the reality of a different set of dreams and visions for Jonas's life -

The dreams and visions of God for Jonas -

Dreams and visions made real and present in the waters of this font where -

As the Spirit rushed in like a violent wind and settled on the disciples like fire on the day of Pentecost -

The Spirit rushed in today like a wave and settled like drops of water and beads of oil on Jonas's head -

So that he may know - through each and every sense in the body that God has given him -

All it is that God dreams and visions for him -

The grace to live as he is called

Inclusion within the communities of his life no matter who he is

Faith that his life is held within God's hands

Peace that passes all understanding

Forgiveness that heals the wrongs he knows and commits

And Love -

Love so wild and present that it rushes like a wind

Burns like a fire

And breaks down the doors of fear and bonds of death.

Amen.

Rev. Peter Carlson Schattauer, Guest Preacher