

Peace Works: A Spring-Into-Life Worship Series for Such a Time as This

Sunday, May 5	-- Meeting the Holy at the Table -- Aloha
Sunday, May 12	-- Interwoven into the Body of Christ -- Ubuntu
Sunday, May 19	-- Act Out Love, Like a Good Samaritan -- Si Se Puede
Sunday, May 26	-- Jacob, Esau & Conflict Resolution -- Shalom
Sunday, June 2	-- Emptying Oneself is Most Fulfilling -- Agape
Pentecost, June 9	-- Pentecost Spirit is Engaging -- Heiwa
Sunday, June 16	-- God's Long-Term Plan for Peace -- Aloha

"Peace Works: Pentecost Spirit is Engaging -- Heiwa"

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Day of Pentecost, Sunday, June 9, 2019

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Mark 12:28-34, Acts 2:1-13

Mark 12:28-34 (NRSV)

⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Acts 2:1-13 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying

to one another, "What does this mean?"¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Resolution to the Confusion

They say a preacher decided
that for Pentecost he would turn his life over to the Holy Spirit of God,
that he was going to completely trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to tell him
whatever he was supposed to say from the pulpit,
that he was so trusting he did not need to prepare a sermon in advance.

On the appointed Sunday morning,
he stepped up into the pulpit and silently prayed as he waited.
He waited for the Spirit to tell him what word to proclaim.
Lo and behold, the Spirit did speak.
"Tell my people" said a celestial voice, "that you are unprepared!"

We are ready and waiting, preparing and preaching
for a **resolution to the confusion**.

To get to this point, together, we have moved through the amazing season of Easter.
Eastertide flows for a month and a half of Sundays.

For six weeks we've been rejoicing and reveling
in the Spirit's everlasting gift to the whole people of God,
the gift of the power
to become new creations, new realities, new beings in Christ.

Our worship theme throughout Eastertide has been Peace Works,
which is both a whispered prayer for hope and a bold statement of faith
from a people who live in calamitous times,
people like us who daily seek a calming presence.

We've seen posters and signs held high that say,
"Not Your Thoughts Or Prayers But Actions."

Peace Works reminds us that our actions do matter, as well as our choices of language.
We have been learning and revisiting words that spark us to act in the here and now,
words that may be new to some of us,
language that speaks to the inner workings of peace,
an international, interpersonal vocabulary
that serves to increase our common understanding.

Aloha, from Hawaii, the spirit in me affirms the spirit in you.
We practice *aloha* by listening closely to each other, listening to the stories of our lives.

Ubuntu, from South Africa, we need each other to be who we are to be, together.
We practice *ubuntu* when we affirm that everyone is more complex than a single story.

Si se puede, Spanish for yes, we can,
yes, we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”
We practice peace by carrying and bearing the Cross of being a good neighbor.

Shalom, from Hebrew, meaning wholeness, peace.
We practice God’s means whenever we choose the ways of peace to resolve conflict.

Agape, Greek for the unconditional love God has for us,
the unconditional love God wills for us to embody, grace with some skin on it.
Peace takes time, takes effort, takes cooperation, so relax, channel the holy,
let the Spirit of God work her magic and mystery of peace over the lapse of time,
a freewheeling, spirit-led dance in which we can all participate.

Today, my friends, on this holy of holy days, the Day of Pentecost,
we focus on God’s spiritual gift of **heiwa**, which is Japanese for peace.

Heiwa draws together two unique Japanese characters.

The character for Hei means calmness.

The character for Wa means peace.

When combined, Hei and Wa – **Heiwa** –

invites us to seek the calmness, the blessed balance that lies within,
and to combine our inner calmness with the peace and harmony
that’s experienced when we learn to live together,
the harmony discovered through common understanding.

Heiwa, the peaceful calm and harmonious living found through our commonality.

Heiwa flows naturally and brings us beautifully

into a deepening appreciation of today, the Day of Pentecost,
which helps us to discern...

Resolution to the Confusion

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

*² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind,
and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*

*³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,
and a tongue rested on each of them.*

*⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages,
as the Spirit gave them ability.” --Acts 2: 1-4*

The Holy Spirit is compared to the sound of the rush of a mighty wind.

The Spirit is compared with the visual of tongues of flame that dance atop heads.

Most important is what the Spirit brings: the gift of understanding.

Jerusalem, where this takes place, was an international melting pot.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered,
because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked,
“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia” [and so forth...]

It is no accident, no coincidence that Luke, the writer of the book of Acts,
mentioned first the names of four areas

-- *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia* –

because people from these areas gathered to build a tower,
a story told way back in Genesis 11.

Remember what happened to the builders of the Tower of Babel:

Then they said,

*“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens,
and let us make a name for ourselves;*

otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

The Lord came down and observed their selfish, self-centered activity,
and then *“the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth,
and they left off building the city.”*

In the book of Genesis, Mesopotamians begin to build the Tower of Babel
to make a name for themselves.

In the book of Acts, the Spirit is given to all people of faith,
equally blessing those from Mesopotamia and all around.

The same **resolution to the confusion** is given to Jews and Greeks,
Arabs and Christians, men and women, all ages and stages of life and love,
united, unified, unselfishly seeking to build the Church,
to lift up the name of Jesus Christ.

While building the Tower of Babel, everyone spoke the same language,
yet divided due to their inability to cope with differences,
which led to confusion and dissolution.

While birthing the Church at Jerusalem, everyone speaks different languages,
yet unite due to the spirit’s ability to discover common understanding,
which produces resolution & unification.

The Spirit teaches people how to listen to each other’s heart language,
to native tongues, to the meanings that bubble up and out from the heart.

Maybe, just maybe what the world needs today

in the midst of the mayhem and monsters and madness
is fewer towers and more altars.
Maybe the Spirit is telling us to make fewer attempts to make a name for ourselves
and put more effort into building up the beloved community.
God's antidote to the Tower of Babel is the Power of Pentecost.
God's gift of the Spirit on Pentecost is the **resolution to the confusion**.

The Spirit, my friends, does not make something out of nothing.
No!

The Spirit makes something out of something.
Yes!

Genesis 1 and 2 proclaim that the universe was made, not out of nothing,
but by the Spirit creating something out of the chaos,
and that something was good.

Ezekiel proclaims that the Spirit breathed new life into a valley of dry bones,
and that new life was good.

Luke testifies in Acts that the Spirit birthed the Church out of the something called folks,
and those somethings were good.

Today and every day the Holy Spirit is alive,
ready willing and able to make something of us,
recreating and reworking and remolding,
forming, reforming, and transforming new realities
and a beloved community
out of the chaos and calamity of our life and times,
and this faith community is good.

We draw deep upon the Spirit, using the gift of *Heiwa*,
the peace that calms and seeks harmony between folks,
the Spirit spurs us to be one and many at the same time,
to celebrate our commonality in the midst of a glorious diversity.

Resolution to the Confusion

They say the endangered species list recently added common courtesy and civility.
Are you like me, wondering if all is truly lost, stolen or strayed,
if civility and harmony are gone forever,
or whether it is about time for us to roll up our sleeves and get busy
channeling the Holy Spirit, seeking peace and harmony.

Elvis Costello was not joking when he sang:

"What's so funny about peace, love, and understanding?"

At Doc Chey restaurant by Emory University,
the motto is *Peace Love Noodles*.

We need good food for body and soul.

Does the Church want God's gift to create understanding,

to create something out of something, to make something good, that lasts?
Or, is this one of those gifts some distant Soul gave to us on a special occasion,
a gift we unwrapped
then stuck in a drawer
and walked away and forgot all about?
Do we have a choice when it comes to practicing *Heiwa*?
More often than not, one always has a choice...

If we abdicate our calling,
relinquish our gifts of the spirit,
return to God these tongues of fire
that dance atop our heads so we can't blow them out,
who do you think
will command the spotlight, grab the center, take the point?
Will we abdicate our calling, return the gift out of fear of letting it set us afire?
Are we fearful, afraid of failure, afraid of being told no, afraid of loss,
afraid of controversy, of making ripples, even afraid of fear itself...?
...are we so afraid
we refuse to use the gift of grace that is dancing and alit in our souls!
What do you think might happen when we take a risk
and let the miracle of understanding come alive again,
letting the Holy Spirit take over, lead us ever forward,
open our ears and hearts and doors and then see what happens.
Dare to imagine the Holy Spirit as still viable, still alive, still moving and empowering,
willing to guide us to listen as well as to speak the truth in love
in the midst of diversity and division and Decatur!
Be bold to imagine the world around us being born again from above,
grateful for the gift of the Spirit, something remade from something!
Imagine a **resolution to the confusion** taken out and set loose, free to be!

When a disciple of Jesus Christ named Barbara Johnson
found out that she had cancer,
Barbara took it upon herself to share in her church
and with friends in other congregations
her painful struggles and small victories.
Barbara's openness and authenticity and humor
in the face of human frailty and brokenness
gave other's permission to be open with their own lives.
She got cards and calls from people with similar concerns,
people seeking out a neighbor to share their stories.
One woman wrote that while she was recovering from cancer she wore a wig.
She was with her 4-year-old grandson one day
when her scalp started itching...beneath the wig.
"This thing is driving me crazy," she said,

so she reached up and yanked off the wig.
The little boy exclaimed, "Wow, Grandma, you've got trick hair!"

Another friend wrote Barbara to say that
while she was in her bathroom putting in her contact lenses,
she saw her prosthesis lying on the counter
and her wig soaking in the sink.
She thought, "This isn't a bathroom. It's a used parts department!"

Her thoughts may be applied to the church of Jesus Christ.
We are not a museum for saints; we're a used parts department!
We've got people who have been used and abused and misused.
We're inclusive of some folks who feel all used up and burned out,
neglected, rejected and dejected.
We have a long line of members and friends who have been badly hurt
yet are discovering through the church new healing and hope.

Many of our used parts have found new usefulness
in areas and ways they never imagined,
and in the process have discovered joy and meaning.
We don't call ourselves used anymore: we're *Pre-Owned*.
Something new, a new reality, has been made out of the somethings of us.

If you get up real close to these used parts we call Christ's church,
they might not look like much.
We may be slightly bent, worn out in places, hobbled in others.
We are no longer shiny or fancy.
We certainly aren't successful in the eyes of high society.
Sacrificing so much made us patch our clothes and re-sole our shoes.
Living faithfully has honed our once-sharp corners.
Serving as Christ first served us has smoothed the rough places.
Look too close, you'll witness the cost of discipleship.

Maybe it would be better to take a few steps back.
Look at the overall effect.
Take us in the totality of ministry.
Soak in the collective beauty of these used parts that make up the church.
God's Spirit is leading us into a new day.
Notice that when you see and experience the whole people of God
at work and play in the community,
you might catch a glimpse of the Holy Spirit's
miracle of peace, love and understanding
being removed from the endangered species list.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!