

Good Trouble in the Water

Most of the Feast Days of the church are remembrances of significant aspects of Jesus's life and ministry such as Christmas and Easter. No less important are The Baptism of Our Lord, The Annunciation, and The Ascension. There are three outliers. Two of them, Trinity Sunday and Christ the King, are about theological concepts. That leaves today, The Day of Pentecost. In a sense this is a celebration of the absence of Christ in the world and the coming of another person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. On this day, ten days after the Ascension, and fifty days after Easter Day the Holy Spirit descends with wind and flame like a wildfire and overwhelms the disciples. They are given a new ability to speak in other languages. They are also given the gifts to heal, to preach, and teach as Jesus did. As Christ has left us to sit enthroned in Heaven, they have become Christ's body on earth. The Holy Spirit has enlivened them for their mission to spread to all the world the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. They will preach that we are no longer subject to sin and death. Rather we have been freed to choose a different way, the way of love and eternal life.

From here on out in The Acts of the Apostles we read the stories of the ministries of the disciples turned apostles. That is those who were once students of Jesus who are now the ones sent out (*apostolos*) by Jesus to share the word and make disciples of all nations.¹ These apostles are going to preach to eager crowds but they are also going to come up against authorities, both political and religious, who consider them no more than troublemakers. We are heirs of their troublemaking. Thus we are reminded each Pentecost Day that we have been given gifts like theirs if we will claim them. We have also been commissioned to make trouble like they did.

The kind of trouble we are to get into is what John Lewis called "good trouble." Good trouble in the name of Jesus. We are to live and preach and teach the Good News of Jesus to everyone we meet. Each of us is commissioned at our baptism when we respond to the question, "Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? With the words, 'I will, with God's help.'" Be very clear doing that in this world can get you in trouble.

This kind of trouble may have a cost, but it is also healing. Indeed, you may remember the story of the paralytic in the Gospel of John. He has been sitting by the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years waiting for the water to be stirred by an angel. His hope is to be the first one in the water so that he might be healed. In the King James Version of this story the translators wrote it this way, "For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."² When the water was troubled or stirred up by an angel it had the power to heal.

The trouble the apostles got into was not just for the healing of others, it was for their own healing. When we step into the life of Christ as the ill stepped into the pool of troubled water, we are healed. Like one who is healed of cancer or a heart ailment, the healing brings new meaning to life. Each day is appreciated as a gift. Each day is a day to live with compassion. Each day is to live less for this world and more fully into the Kingdom of God.

¹ Matthew 28:19 NRSV

² John 5:5 KJV

Whether our healing is of a physical illness or a spiritual illness, we cannot go on living our old lives. We have been changed and we tell everyone about the meaning of that change in us. For those healed of cancer or heart ailments, it is the gift of days that otherwise might not have been lived. For us who have been healed by the love of Christ, it is for the realization of the abundant life we have been granted through Christ.

So when we see the water troubled, we don't just dip our toe in. Like the African slaves who composed the spiritual "Wade in the Water," we wade in chest deep to get the full measure of the healing. We immerse ourselves in the water stirred up by angels and the Spirit. That is where healing can be found for all of God's children.

This Day of Pentecost we are reminded that where we find wholeness is in God's love. It is also where we find our commission to do God's work in the world. Wade in the water because God is going to trouble it and heal you and strengthen you. When we step out of those troubled waters we will not be able to stop sharing the message. But first we have to step in. We have to be willing to let the Holy Spirit stir us up, disturb our complacency, and inspire us to speak the truth of Jesus Christ to anyone who will listen. Wade in these musical waters children and find the healing power of the Spirit that is there for you.

[Sermon continues with a live rendition of Margaret Bond's "Troubled Waters" by Emmanuel's Music Director Sonya Subbayya Sutton. It may also be heard hear <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoTaO6jldjg>]

AMEN