# Pentecost 2016: Moments of clarity

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship  
Will Fitzgerald  
May 15, 2016

Acts 2:1-21

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

We read in the first chapter of Acts that the group of disciples who remained in the immediate aftermath of Jesus’s death and resurrection numbered about 120 people. This included the remaining apostles, of course, and some other men by name, and some, at least, of Jesus’s brothers. There were “certain women” who were part of this, too. Luke names Mary, Jesus’s mother, as one of them, but we can be pretty certain that Mary Magdalene and Joanna, both of whom saw the resurrected Lord were in that number. Joanna was very likely wealthy and one of the women who supported Jesus financially (Luke 8:1-4). So, there were men and women, people from at least two generations, and economic disparity.

On the day of Pentecost, they all seem to have gathered in a public space, and a lot of very exciting things happen. There are many Jews present to celebrate one of the pilgrim feasts, Pentecost, and they have come from lots of places. Suddenly these early followers of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit, and start speaking in languages that people from far away understand, and there appear to be flames of fire over their heads. This amazed them (though, of course, there were some scoffers, as there always are).

As exciting as this all is, as it turns out, the explanation of what is happening is even more important that the miraculous event. Peter gets up to explain: the prophesy of Joel that “in the last days” the Spirit of God would be poured out on everyone: male, female, rich, poor, slave, free, young, old was taking place before their very eyes, as, indeed, it was. And the signs and portents of Joel’s vision had been visible in the “deeds, wonders, and signs” that God performed through Jesus. And more than that, Peter’s hearers were implicated in the death of the one whom God had sent, the one sent to be “Lord and Messiah.” No wonder many of them cried out in dismay about what they could do! And no wonder they received the good news that they could repent and be baptized and follow in Jesus’s way, and that they, too, would receive the Holy Spirit.

So, let me talk about the prophesies that are made in this passage. Basically, there are two groups of prophesies given. The first one to mention is Peter’s. His prophesy is to clarify what the earlier prophesies of Joel’s meant, and to clarify the place of the Pentecost miracle. “What does this mean?” the people asked, and Peter clarifies it for them. They are caught up in the main line of God’s work in the world: the coming of Jesus as Lord and Messiah, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that they needed to turn away from their current lives and turn towards Jesus to be caught up in God’s work, too.

The other group of prophesies mentioned here are the words spoken by the early believers under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In the individual and diverse languages of the pilgrims who had come to celebrate Pentecost, they spoke of “God’s deeds of power”. Like Peter, they were clarifying what was happening: this was the powerful work of God that they were all caught up in.

J. Barrett Lee, the pastor at North Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo, calls these “moments of clarity,” when, through the Spirit of God, God clarifies the meaning of the situation. Prophesy, Barrett reminds us, is not so much about predicting a far off future as it is making clear what is going on around us now in the work and economy of God.

We certainly are apt to ask questions about the meaning of our current tumultuous times. And I think we can, and should, pray for the Holy Spirit to give us “moments of clarity” in which we see something of what is going on behind the scenes, and what our response should be.

Sara Wenger Shenk, the president of AMBS (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) recently wrote a blog post, “By what moral authority?” (link: https://www.ambs.edu/publishing/2016/05/By-what-moral-authority.cfm) in which she points out the need for leadership with moral authority, but that there are also countless ways of getting such leadership wrong. We only have to look around us to know the truth of that statement. Shenk calls for a humble, yielded moral authority; like Jesus’s authority, “grounded in the unshakeable love of his Abba.”

Today’s passage reminds me that the Spirit of God (who is also the Spirit of adoption reminding us that we can cry out, “Abba, Father” to God as well) distributes a gift of prophecy in a special way to some, like Peter. But the gift of prophecy is also poured out on “all flesh.” We can claim as our birthright that there *will* be moments of clarity where we understand in a new way, what is happening, and that there *will* be leaders who can help clarify things for us as well. We do live in fractious and tumultuous times—but when have the times ever been anything by fractious and tumultuous. But let us not allow us to fear or shrink back. With a proper yieldedness, with a proper humility, with a proper openness to the Spirit in ourselves and in others, we, too, can experience these moments of clarity.