

**Sermon: “Being a ‘Dayenu’ People”**  
**Sunday, June 12, 2011**  
**The Rev. Peter Faass, Rector**  
**Christ Church, Shaker Heights**  
**Pentecost Year A: Acts 2:1-12; John 20:19-23**

In the Hebrew liturgical calendar the feast of Pentecost was originally an agricultural festival known as the Feast of Weeks. The number of weeks it commemorated was seven – or forty-nine days – which began with the feast of Passover when the seed of the first spring planting was sown. That seed would have been mostly leafy vegetables and other quick growing produce that were harvested during this springtime festival. Last spring in northeast Ohio we had an example of how quickly grown produce like Swiss Chard, leaf lettuce and radishes, planted around Easter, were ready for harvest at Pentecost. With this year’s cool, wet weather we will be lucky to harvest any of these vegetables before July 4th!

The Christian feast of Pentecost is modeled on the Jewish calendar, with Pentecost falling seven weeks after Easter. Christian Pentecost celebrates the reaping of the harvest of the Holy Spirit, which concludes the Jesus narrative in scripture. Our Pentecost is the crowning achievement of the Jesus story.

We have heard two scriptural accounts of that harvest this morning. The first from the Book of Acts is the more familiar story to most of us. In it we hear of the apostles gathered all together in a room in Jerusalem waiting for the promised arrival of the Spirit foretold to them by Jesus ten days prior at his Ascension. The Acts story relays the drama of rushing winds, the cacophony of languages and tongues of fire landing on everyone’s head as the Holy Spirit descends upon those gathered. Acts is the Cecil B. DeMille or Stephen Spielberg version of Pentecost: It’s a big production with dazzling special effects.

Because this account provides such vivid imagery it is the version we most remember and emulate in the Church; ergo the colorful streamers representing the tongues of fire, the fan representing the wind and the Gospel being read in eight different languages today.

In the Gospel of John’s account of Pentecost the arrival of the Spirit is much more subtle. In fact this account is so understated that many people miss it as a Pentecost event. We read, “Jesus said to [the disciples] . . . ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” That’s it!

The one parallel between the two stories is that both report the disciples being gathered together in one place. Biblical scholars understand this place to be the upper room where Jesus ate the Last Supper or Seder with his disciples the night before he died. Both John and Acts mentioning this detail points out another subtle, but important difference in the story of Pentecost. John's Gospel states that when Jesus appeared to the disciples and breathed the Spirit upon them that, "it was the evening of the day of Resurrection." In other words the Pentecostal event happened on the same day as the Resurrection.

In Acts the narrative indicates that the Pentecostal event was fifty days after the Resurrection. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that, "after [Jesus'] suffering he presented himself alive [and] appeared to [the disciples] . . . during forty days" before he ascended. Our passage today begins with the phrase, "when the day of Pentecost had come" and then it conveys the coming of the Spirit. This Pentecost was the Jewish one, which then adds ten days to the forty, equaling fifty.

Regardless of whether Pentecost occurred on the same day as the Resurrection or fifty days later, it is a joy-filled event. Whether it was tongues of fire and ecstatic speaking in tongues those disciples in the upper room experienced or their being gently breathed upon by Jesus, both changed their lives.

Because of their joy at being changed, I imagine in both instances the disciples ended up singing a new version of the joyful "Dayenu" song of Passover that they had sung with Jesus at the Seder of the Last Supper. In Hebrew "Dayenu" means "it would have been enough." Dayenu rejoices in that when we think what we have been given is enough, God is always there with more abundant blessings.

"If [God] had brought us out of Egypt, Dayenu! If [God] had split the sea for us, Dayenu! If [God] had given us the Torah, Dayenu! If [God] had brought us to the Land of Israel, Dayenu!"

As the Spirit infused the disciples with the presence and love of God at Pentecost, I imagine the disciples thinking of the mighty acts of the Hebrew Passover and now singing "it would have been enough" for the Word to grow to adulthood and share his amazing parables about God's grace in the world. Dayenu! It would have been enough when the Word said to his enemies, "Father forgive them." Dayenu! It would have been enough for the Word to die for us and then rise from the tomb overcoming death and sin. Dayenu!

But now beyond any blessing anyone of us could ever imagine or expect, the Word at Pentecost is now written on our hearts by the Spirit as a blessing to sustain us in all of life. Dayenu!

As I stated earlier Pentecost is the crowning event of the Jesus story; it is infinite Dayenu! Pentecost is the celebration of how God always gives more than enough. How God is always giving more than our wildest dreams and expectations.

Both versions of Pentecost in the Bible remind us we need to be attentive to just how God gives you and me more than enough. Sometimes it's in the big and splashy, but at other times it is so subtle we can miss it.

So to make us more attentive to God's giving us more than enough, this summer I want to engage in a simple discipline of being attentive to how the Spirit of God comes to us and how we can become a Dayenu people!

This past week an article appeared on the website Episcopal Café titled "The Practice of thank-you." It was written by the Rev. Donald Schell. Schell writes, "I . . . write about a practice of gratitude, a new daily routine that I'm hoping to make as habitual as flossing my teeth."

"The practice is new for me. For the past two weeks each night after I set the alarm and just before putting my bedside light out, I've journaled a short litany of specific "thank you's." Literally I begin each night's journal page - "thank you God for..." and then simply make a new list[of] thank you's for eight or ten specific things I've experienced or done or seen that day. I'm looking to remember that my life is blest, that all life is blest."

"My inspiration for the practice came from reading Robert Emmons' research on gratitude. Emmons is a professor at the University of California, Davis." "Emmons' research on gratitude described an experiment in which he'd introduced a group to a simple practice that significantly changed participants' experience of themselves and others' experience of them.

Actually he had three study groups undertake distinct ten-week disciplines of journaling, none of the groups knowing what the other group had been asked to do.

- One group's daily task was to write a single sentence giving thanks for five things that had happened to them or that they'd been able to do.
- Another group's task was to write a one-sentence summary of five things that they'd experienced as hassles, things that they were displeased or troubled at.
- And the third group was simply asked to list five recent events that had some impact on them or had made some difference to them."

"The group assigned to journal their gratitude reported that they were noticeably happier, more productive, and were sleeping better at night. Their measurable stress indicators (like blood pressure) went down. And they reported family and friends repeatedly asking them what had happened to them that they'd changed so much.

Those recording hassles did not show the positive changes, and those in the neutral group showed some changes, but not nearly such big changes as the gratitude group.”

USHERS HAND OUT “Count your blessings” sheets.

I invite you to join me for the next ten weeks of summer through Labor Day as we count our blessings each night before we go to bed. The ushers are handing out “Count your Blessings” sheets for you so each night for seventy days we can engage in this practice. Let’s see how being attentive to the Holy Spirit and God’s blessings can change our lives.

This focus on giving thanks for the blessings of life and seeing that result in a positive paradigm shift in the quality of our lives is a Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Counting our Blessings is to be attentive to how God is present in our life and reveals how God always gives us more than enough. Counting our blessings is to receive a new, resurrected life. Counting our blessings is to become a Dayenu people.  
*Amen.*