

“What Does This Mean?”

Rev. Jan Scott

Hello, Pentecost people! Today is the Sunday recognizing that moment when a small band of Jesus’ disciples would be empowered by a Divine act. Sound from heaven like a mighty wind would rush upon them; divided tongues as of fire would rest over each of them. And from this, the disciples would be filled with the Holy Spirit, it says, and begin speaking in all sorts of languages other than what was spoken in Galilee with everyone understanding for themselves.

We consider this to be the beginning of the Church of the Body of Christ, for from it Peter will address the Israelites, and ask them to repent and be baptized and 3,000 would do so, and they would then begin to devote themselves to Christ. Today is Pentecost Sunday and we are Pentecost people.

It is the only day in the liturgical year for the color red – signifying the Spirit’s power and energy of what had occurred – from this rag tag group of followers who frequently misunderstood Jesus, they would evolve through the years into the Church, set off by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the color red does come with some qualification as with parishioners at a previous church I served, husband and wife, Russ and Mary. With their permission, I repeat their story:

Russ appeared from the bedroom to announce he was dressed for Church. Wife Mary, “You can’t go like that. It’s Pentecost Sunday. Put on something red.” A few minutes later, Russ re-appeared from their bedroom wearing a bright-red polo shirt, crisp khaki pants and comfortable black shoes. “Well, how does this look? Am I ready for Church on Pentecost Sunday?” Mary, looking up briefly, replied, “Yes, yes, you look fine. Just don’t go into Target today.” [laughter]

Red is a symbol of energy and power of the Holy Spirit for what would become the Body of Christ on earth – the Christian Church – with all of its different manifestations and struggles. From an AME congregation in Charleston, South Carolina, withstanding deadly bigotry, to Catholic congregations in Sri Lanka facing terrorism, to our church and the many churches of Iowa all working our way through what it means to be faithful, the Church’s beginning had a forceful start, but also its first challenge.

It came from the voices of those bewildered that day to see Galileans speaking from Mesopotamia, Asia, Egypt and Rome (just to name a few) to prompt them to ask, “What does this mean?” A question *and* a challenge which still rests before us.

What does it mean to be the Body of Christ? What will be a common voice which will be understood by every Christian, even while we speak through various languages and cultures? Who are we with other religions not professing Jesus as Christ? Who are we to be in this world?