

Today is Pentecost. Earlier in worship we read the first part of the Pentecost story. Before we read our Second Scripture today I want to remind you what happened prior to Pentecost and then what happened at Pentecost.

The person who wrote the book of Acts is also the same person who wrote the gospel we call Luke. In the end of Luke, these are the events which he records. In the 22nd chapter Jesus is praying at the Mount of Olives when a crowd comes up to him. The crowd is led by Judas.

Judas is one of the followers of Jesus. As Judas approaches Jesus he leans over to give Jesus a kiss. But Jesus then says to Judas, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" The crowd then leads Jesus away. Betrayal by Judas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus.

The next scene that Luke records is Peter following from a distance. He sits down and a servant girl approaches him. The servant girl says to Peter, "You were with that man. You were with that man Jesus." But Peter denies having known Jesus. Another person approaches Peter and he denies him a second time. A third person approaches Peter and, once again, Peter denies knowing Jesus. Another story of betrayal by a follower of Jesus.

The next scene is Jesus being mocked. He is then brought to trial. "Are you the Son of God?" they ask. He says to them, "You say that I am." Jesus is brought before Pilate. Pilate questions Jesus and concludes he has no reason to condemn him. But the crowd voices their displeasure with this verdict. The crowd wins out and Jesus is taken away for crucifixion. Another story of betrayal.

Jesus is then hung on a cross and dies. But the next story is the story of some women going to the tomb. They do not find a dead body but an empty tomb.

Then the next story that Luke records is 2 men on their way to a village called Emmaus. They meet up with a stranger who turns out to be Jesus. He breaks bread with them and then he disappears only to reappear with the disciples one last time.

All of these events precede the story of Pentecost. Pentecost, as we read earlier, is the story of God's Holy Spirit coming from heaven like the sound of a violent wind and divided tongues, as of fire, appearing on each of them. Pentecost is the story of new life being given to the followers of Jesus. Pentecost is the story of vibrancy in a community.

But remember what happened prior to Pentecost. Prior to Pentecost there was lots and lots of betrayal by the people that were the closest to Jesus. This band of followers that Jesus chose and placed his trust in included people who abandoned him. This abandonment is followed by the mocking, and beating, and crucifixion of Jesus. In other words, before any new life of Pentecost there was betrayal and there was death.

Our Christian faith is rooted in the story of new life coming after betrayal and death. New life comes after something else has ended. We believe in life after death.

Today we celebrate our graduates and we welcome our confirmands into church membership. It is a time when we recognize the ending of school and also the process of confirmation. I like that we recognize graduates and confirmands. Not so much for personal achievement but it is a public recognition that life is about endings and life is about new beginnings.

You may be at a point in your life right now when you are seeing some things come to an end. What may be ending is a relationship. What may be ending may be a place. What may be ending may be a job. What may be ending may be a dream. Many of us within this church would describe the difficulty we recently endured as a congregation as an ending of something. What ended is different for different people. Or maybe there is something in your life that needs to die but you are fighting hard against letting something end. You are fearful of the loss.

But our faith is based on a belief that when something ends, something else is allowed to begin. When something dies, new life is allowed to be birthed. Pentecost would not be able to occur unless there was death before it.

Pentecost, the story of God's Holy Spirit blowing into a community and creating something new comes about only after betrayal and then the death of Jesus. Pentecost, the witness of God's Holy Spirit blowing fresh into a community, comes to a group of believers that are wondering what to do next.

So if we are at a point in our life individually or as a family or a church where something has died or needs to die or we have felt betrayed by others, what are we do next? I think our second Scripture has something to say to that. I am going to conclude by reading words from the 4th chapter of 1st Peter.

These words are written to a community of believers that are being picked on for becoming Christians. By becoming Christians they have experienced the death of former relationships with people who were their friends. And so after the death of these former relationships they are searching for guidance in what to do next.

Let us conclude with hearing these words from 1st Peter.

Read I Peter 4: 7-19.

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