
A Pentecost Moment

We were making more memories at Kanuga last weekend.

I came back to our cabin on Saturday night after Bingo thinking that my evening was over. My stepson Robert (age 11) met me at the door pleading to play pickleball. He loves pickleball and I might be the only person I know who has never played the game. So, we went down to the gym where a court had been set up. Robert patiently explained the rules to me – things like how to keep score, when to let the ball bounce, and what you could and could not do in the “kitchen” – and we got started. It felt a little like playing ping-pong while standing on the table, but it was fun.

After playing several increasingly intense games, I suggested that we end the night with a winner-take-all free throw contest. Robert agreed and we moved to the foul line on the basketball court. My shot rolled off the side of the rim. I rebounded the ball and, after reminding Robert that the championship of the world depended on his shot, gave him the ball. “I know,” he said as he backed up and then stepped into a perfectly arched shot. Nothing but net! Robert’s shot went in without ever touching the rim.

We both jumped for joy, fists in the air and screaming at the top of our lungs.

It was a Pentecost moment.

It was Moses who yearned for all the people to experience the knowledge of God previously known only to the prophets. In the book of Numbers, when the people complained that some were prophesying without having been appointed by Moses, the great prophet famously says, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29)

It was Paul who described the outpouring of the Spirit as the “first fruits” of the Kingdom of God. In the eighth chapter of Romans, he says that those who are in Christ have received “the first fruits of the Spirit” as we await the fulfillment of the coming of the Kingdom and its renewal of the entire created order. (Rom. 8:23)

It was Luke who told the Pentecost story in a way that seemed to directly address the challenges of the destruction of the Tower of Babel and the giving of the Law at Sinai.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, God scattered the people who were building a tower for themselves, leaving them without a common language. (Gen. 11) In the story of Pentecost, God brings the people back together by enabling them to hear and speak to each other. Luke even includes a table of nations in his telling of the Pentecost story (Acts 2:8-12) that seems to parallel the table included in the telling of the Babel story (Gen. 10:1-32).

In the story of the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses experienced the power and presence of the Lord on the top of Mount Sinai where the Ten Commandments were revealed to him. Christ too ascended to be with God, but at Pentecost comes down not with the Law written on clay tablets but with the gift of his own Spirit to be written on the hearts of the people which, as Paul claimed, will enable them to fulfill the requirements of the Law.

Pentecost feels like such a big thing. And it is. But it works in the world through the aggregation of small things. Every time we lose ourselves in moments of awe and wonder, or even the joy of just being, we create space for the Spirit to grow and move. Every time we get small, God gets big.

It’s not that Pentecost reveals to us anything that we don’t already know. We already know about Jesus. It’s just that we sometimes need to be reminded of how it is that we go about experiencing the power of the Spirit.

Kanuga is a good place to be reminded!

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