

Day of Pentecost-June 5, 2022

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Acts 2:1-21

“What Does This Mean?”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

“What does this mean?” Lutherans probably would be inclined to believe it was Martin Luther who coined this phrase. In Luther’s catechism after each commandment, after each article of the Apostle’s Creed and after each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther asks the question “What does this mean?” and then provides the answer. Without giving these meanings, we would misunderstand what God’s word really means. Luther’s explanation of the meanings was not developed from his own thoughts, but were explanations that Jesus made clear by what he said. Jesus explains that each of the commandments are not simply about things we are not to do, but he explains that each of the commandments are also about what we are supposed to do. The commandment not to kill means more than simply not taking someone else’s life. It also means that we are to help our neighbor in every way. The commandment not to steal means more than not taking something that doesn’t belong to us from our neighbor. It also means that we should help our neighbor protect all his property. The commandment to not bear false witness against our neighbor means more than we are not to speak badly about someone for others to hear. It also means that we are to explain our neighbors’ actions in the kindest way possible. The petition in the Lord’s prayer to give us today our daily bread means more than asking our Heavenly Father for food to eat for the day. It also means that we are asking our heavenly Father for all our daily needs including our home, clothing, jobs, and even good weather. It is easy for us to misunderstand what is really meant without asking the question “What does this mean?”

In the story of the first Pentecost, we learn that it was not Martin Luther who first coined the phrase, “What does this mean?”, but as we heard this question was asked by all the amazed and astonished people who were witnesses of the first Pentecost. After hearing the sound of the mighty rushing wind and seeing what appeared to be divided tongues of fire over each of the people and then when they heard people speaking in their own languages, but were able to understand everything that was said in other languages, they exclaimed, “What does this mean?” They asked this question, because what they heard, and saw did not make sense to them. Without taking any language classes or listening to any Rosetta Stone educational resources, on this day, they understood clearly what was being said in languages that they had never spoken before. They asked the important question, “What does this mean?”

I was misled by one of our High School classmates from Tri-Valley who I reconnected with at our 40th class reunion a few years ago. I had been a pretty good friend of his through school but had not seen him for many years. I had heard that he was now living in Mitchell, but I wasn’t sure what he was doing. When I asked him what he was doing he replied that he was the lead spiritual director in the town of Mitchell. Since I had just been ordained by this time this piqued my curiosity. I remembered that he was from a strong Catholic family. When I asked him what this title meant, I wondered if he did this work in his own parish or in the larger Catholic diocese. He explained what he really meant when he said that he was the manager of the wine and spirits department at the largest Hy Vee store in Mitchell. His explanation to “What does this mean?” clarified what he really did.

I attended the SD ELCA Synod Assembly at Our Saviors in Sioux Falls this past Friday and yesterday morning. We enjoyed the music provided by the group called Glocal. This group consisted of people from Puerto Rico, Japan, and Nicaragua. While the members from this group were from around the globe, they were bringing their message in song locally, thus the name Glocal. Several of the songs they sang are in the newer Lutheran hymnbook. The songs we sang have spiritual backgrounds and lively rhythms. However, many of the songs they sang were sung using the native language of the people. This would not be very helpful to most of us who didn't know these different languages, but before we could ask, "What does this mean?" We were given the meaning of the words. The song that we learned yesterday, I have already forgotten how to say the title of the song in the native language, but I do recall that it means, "Our God is a good, good God" and then we would respond in the same native language with words that mean "Yes, He is!" Then we sang the entire song also in English. After repeating these words a few times, it felt a little like the first Pentecost when everyone understood what everyone was saying in different languages.

This was not the conclusion of the people who witnessed the first Pentecost. They concluded that everyone must have had their fill from the spiritual department at Hy-Vee. It was then that Peter did something unusual from what we are used to Peter doing. Instead of offering his opinion about what was happening, he did what Luther did when he gave the explanations to the parts of the catechism and answered, "What does this mean?" Peter simply got up and spoke words directly from the prophet Joel.

Joel had predicted this day would come when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. Not some of the people, but ALL people. Everyone. Slaves and free people. Young and old. Men and women. The Holy Spirit would open everyone's ears to understand what it meant to be saved by Jesus Christ who was sent into the world by the love of God the Father. At the first Pentecost all members of the Holy Trinity were at work delivering to everyone the good news of salvation. This good news was shocking for some who thought the gospel was reserved for themselves.

In the gospel reading for today, which was read first today, Philip had to have Jesus explain to him what it meant to see the Father. Jesus told Philip since he had seen Jesus and Jesus and the Father are one, Philip had seen the Father every time he looked at Jesus. Philip, like the witnesses of the first Pentecost, needed a lesson on the Holy Trinity. Jesus told Philip that the Trinity is not broken up into three parts and works separately and arrives in one place only when needed. The Trinity is always at work together.

This work of the Trinity is never clearer to me when I perform or witness a baptism. I am amazed and astonished to witness another Pentecost moment during each baptism. Yesterday, although Cruz Alexander Krdzralic was too young to speak a word that we could understand, the Holy Trinity was fully present as he was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and named as a child of God by his heavenly father and given eternal life through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is what baptism means for Cruz and what baptism means for you.

What then does this day of Pentecost mean for you? It means that just as Joel prophesied, we too are living in the last days. And in these last days, before the coming of the Lord's final great and glorious day, the church that was born on the first Pentecost continues to grow on this Pentecost that we celebrate today. Today, you may not have heard a mighty rushing wind, (and I am honestly glad to have a break from mighty winds), but you have seen the Father, because you have heard Jesus, the word of God spoken to you today. And you and I can join our voices with people from all over the world today and say, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." After hearing this good news, we don't need to ask, "What does this mean?" Instead, we proclaim this good news to others and say, "This is most certainly true." Amen