

As many of you know, I majored in organ performance and minored in piano performance. Some of you know that music majors are required to take a class called Music Theory in which students are trained to analyze the music they read as well as the music they hear. Music theory is THE one class that makes or breaks music majors because it can be difficult. Music students are required to learn how to do in depth analysis of the various aspects and structures of any given piece. I happened to absolutely love my theory classes. I loved to analyze everything I looked at and everything I heard. In fact, I loved it so much that it became an aspect of my being and now I cannot listen to any form of music **without** analyzing it, something that I must say is a blessing but at other times it feels like a curse! Anyway, my point is that when I look at or listen to a piece of music I am always analyzing the harmonic structure, the form, the complexity of the harmony, the shape of the melodies and countermelodies, the timbre and all that lies **behind** the notes that are written on paper and the vibrations that hit my eardrums.

This understanding or **not** understanding what lies **behind** the notes reminds me of something John Polkinghorne, the renowned physicist turned Anglican priest, says in his book "Quarks, Chaos and Christianity."

Polkinghorne suggests some people are “**nothing butters**” when it comes to the world in which we live. They are reductionists who see a thing as “**nothing but**” its physical explanation. They need only look at the most elemental form of a thing, need only look at the surface, to explain everything away. However, this **nothing but** approach does **not** get behind and beyond an elemental way of seeing. For example, Bach and Beethoven’s greatest compositions **do** reach our ears as **nothing but** vibrations against our eardrums because that is how the beauty of their work is transmitted. However, we cannot simply reduce their music to mere vibrations hitting our eardrums. The notes of their music convey so much **more** and we miss the point if we reduce what we hear to a simple physical phenomenon.

In today’s reading from Acts we find some “**nothing butters.**” The reading startles us with a scene of unimaginable energy verging on chaos as we hear about a sound like the rush of a mighty wind filling the whole house. There are tongues of fire appearing among the people. There is a multitude of people speaking in a cacophony of languages. At the center of it all, there are a group of fellows enthusiastically speaking about this Jesus person. And then, there are those **nothing butters** who reduce the excitement and experience to **nothing but** a drunken mob, **nothing but** an

outbreak of religious hysteria. These **nothing butters** sneer as they say, “They are filled with new wine.”

Well, this is **anything but** just a group of people filled with new wine! What caused the cacophony of voices, the heightened emotion and the religious fervor is **not** simply religious hysteria. Something **much more** is going on here. Something very extraordinary has turned these earthy former fishermen and followers of Jesus into interpreters par excellence. In the roll call of people who are gathered from throughout the world, these former fishermen amazingly are speaking with a crystal clarity that leaves all who hear astonished. And, in a **brehtaking** reversal of the story of the tower of Babel where proud humanity was divided by the plurality of languages, the Holy Spirit now comes to Jesus’ frightened pack of followers and transforms them into an unabashed gathering of evangelists communicating with all. As the wind of the Spirit blows into the gathering, the Babel scene is played backward. It is played backward as devout Jews from Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Pamphylia each hear in their own native language the good news of what God has done through Jesus. In fact, the experience was so amazing that before the day was over, 3,000 people were baptized as followers of this person, Jesus.

Pentecost represents the in-breaking of God's purpose for humanity as a varied group of people are brought together in a common understanding of God, **despite** their differences. Pentecost brings us the good news that our humanity, ruined and distorted in our distrust, has been restored in Jesus Christ. The Spirit that animated Jesus' life, the Spirit that united him to the Father and empowered him to be fully the human image of God, is now shared with us. Thus the cacophony of voices becomes a chorus of praise. Babble becomes communication and community is fashioned out of potential adversaries.

We know something more happened on that day. Pentecost was not simply religious hysteria. Something more happened because of the immediate and lasting impact. On that day, the disciples began sharing the Good News of Jesus with those who were far off as well as those who were near. The change that took place on that day was much more than an emotional event or mass hysteria because it empowered and expanded the disciples' ministry enabling them to invite **everyone** into the Reign of God. The change that took place on that day transformed the Jesus movement. It was a transformation **not** achieved by human will but by an act of the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God.

The Pentecost story provides us with a time to remember that God's Spirit is still present and at work in a mighty way. That is why when we gather for worship it cannot be reduced to "nothing but" singing hymns and hearing readings. That is why baptism cannot be reduced to "nothing but" water – H<sub>2</sub>O sprinkled on a person's head. That is why our coming to the table cannot be reduced to "nothing but" eating a piece of bread and drinking a sip of wine. That is why the work we are doing on the room we have adopted for the Homeless Angels' Hotel cannot be reduced to "nothing but" sanding and painting walls. That is why the anti-racism efforts we have hosted cannot be reduced to "nothing but" fellowship events. That is why the mission trip our kids are taking this summer cannot be reduced to "nothing but" a trip. That is why we can **never** limit who is in and who is out of the reach of God's love and God's reign.

The "nothing butters" muttered, "They are drunk on new wine." But, Peter said, "No." Pentecost was and continues to be the living fulfillment of the long promise of God. God's Word is being heard, God's Spirit is being shared, and God's communion is being brought into existence among humanity here and now. Pentecost is about God's Spirit coming to us and that encounter is nothing less than the very presence of God in our lives. Pentecost shows us that what unites us is God's Spirit, a Spirit that unites

us in love, and that is more important than anything that would divide us. And, we who follow Jesus are called and empowered by the Spirit to do nothing less than share that gospel good news and love with everyone we meet.

*Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion*, by John Polkinghorne (NY: Crossroad, 1994) pp. 51-53.