

Pentecost Sunday 15 May 2016

[Acts 2: 1-21 ; Psalm 104: 26-36; Romans 8: 14-17 ; John 14:8-27](#)

[Pentecost C May 15, 2016](#) Textweek

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The recent release of the film "The Jungle Book", a classic that has been reimaged by Walt Disney, was given a rating in India such that children had to be accompanied by adults to watch the movie; the reason being that the Computer-generated imagery (CGI) was so realistic that it was "too scary".

We have, over a fairly short time, all become familiar with films using Computer-generated imagery (CGI); they are an amazing evolution of what we used to know as 'Special Effects'; the techniques employed by the film and visual media to either enhance reality or to make explicit something beyond our immediate comprehension.

Both CGI and 'Special Effects' can trace back to earlier origins in the media of cartoons and comic strips and many of us would have grown up with early Walt Disney cartoon characters and before them with comic book heroes that could do all sorts of supernatural feats.



The 'cartoon' storytelling technique was successful for it enabled us to 'see' what was going on in the unseen mind of the individual characters involved in the narrative. A familiar scene from 'Tom and Jerry' in the endless war of cat and mouse, would see Jerry the mouse, cornered by Tom the cat, apparently with no way of escape; we would then see a light bulb appear over Jerry's head and immediately we'd know that he had a new idea and had discovered a way out of the situation.

The Pentecost narrative from Acts employs an even earlier version of these comic book techniques for illustrating a story; the story teller utilises the special effect of a flame appearing over the heads of the people to illustrate an unseen reality.

Before we more fully explore the Pentecost story let's imagine another cartoon; this time of the well-known anecdote about Archimedes, who got into a bath, made an amazing discovery and then ran naked into the streets shouting "Eureka". If we were

to cartoon this story we might well put a light bulb going on above Archimedes' head just before he jumps out of the bath.

Now when we read back the story we might easily understand that something amazing had occurred in that very moment of the light bulb going on; however the light bulb actually signifies not just the moment of enlightenment, but also the culmination of a process. The cry of "Eureka" is a cry of "I've found it", and the light bulb is then more fully seen and as a coming into an enlightenment that has been sought after.

With this in mind we return to the Pentecost narrative, and perhaps we can now appreciate that the classic interpretation completely misses the subtlety of the special effects that the writer has employed.

This is not a story of a moment in history, nor is it a story of a magical gift that came out of the blue; rather it is an illustrative text that tells of the realisation of an enlightenment that was being sought.

Just as the Easter narratives do not give us a three day program to achieve resurrection, but rather lead us into the process of new life; so too the Pentecost narrative is given to encourage us toward our own cry of "Eureka", to the place where we too can know the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as a reality in our lives. And as we explore the special effects in the narrative we can more fully appreciate what the writer is seeking to reveal to us.

The appearance of the Holy Spirit is made real when "*they were all together in one place*"; initially it was unseen, or unrealised; "*suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting*"; then it appeared, first among them and then with each of them; "*Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.*" And we are told this was a community, rather than an individual reality; "*4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit*".

The early audience for this story would have readily seen in the special effects of the flame a parallel with the story of Moses and the burning bush in Exodus;

"There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.""

The Pentecost story then has another eight verses that speak of the amazement associated with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit; and it is not about everyone suddenly learning new languages, rather these verses emphasise oneness, a unity of all peoples, they speak of being heard and of being able to hear; and even today, this remains a reality that we still seek to find.

If we want to explore the opposite of Pentecost, and see what life is like when lived without the enlightenment of this new reality, then night after night we need only look at the election coverage; an endless story of those not in the same place, of those unable to hear and unaware of what they are even speaking.

It is a sobering reflection of the life we live, for this is the story of those who represent us.

Pentecost invites us to discover a new reality, it is the narrative of Easter's embodiment; and it is a narrative so often written off and distorted by a primitive misunderstanding that this was a one-off event in history.

We are being encouraged to seek a new way of living and to live a life that is enlightened by the Divine; the Pentecost story opens up a whole new narrative for humanity.

The oneness, and unity, of being *in one place* is not a utopian dream, it is an enlightened possibility, and will lead to a change in our whole order of governance; and that new narrative of life is reflected in the other two readings today.

In Romans we are affirmed as "Children of God", and to find that truth we will need to contemplate our Christ-likeness as a lived reality.

And in John's gospel we see a revelation that further directs us toward another often overlooked reality:

"Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these"

If you think Jesus was good, well, look in the mirror for in that reflection is one who can do greater works.

Pentecost is very much a time of encouragement, a time that points us toward the quest for our fullest selves, turning us toward finding ourselves together in one place..

And perhaps, each and all of us, one day soon, will be running naked through the streets shouting "Eureka"

Peter Humphris