“***I Will Pour Out My Spirit***” by S. Finlan, for The First Church, May 31, 2020

**Acts 1:14; 2:1–18**

14 The disciples were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. . .

1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. . .

They asked 8“How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.’”

What a wide range of people were present in Jerusalem to experience the outpouring of the Spirit. It was not just the Jews from many different lands, but also proselytes, that is, Gentile converts to Judaism. So the audience for Peter’s first Pentecost sermon was truly multi-national. Pentecost was one of the great pilgrimage festivals. Thousands of Jews and proselytes traveled to Jerusalem every year for Passover, and many of them stayed the fifty days to celebrate Pentecost there as well. This is why there were so many nationalities present. Further, Peter uses an Old Testament text to speak of the Spirit being poured out upon all age groups and social classes. This was happening right in front of him. The Spirit was universally bestowed upon all people who were true of heart, young and old, slave and free, Mede and Persian and Jew.

This Spirit is for everyone, all nations and ages, everyone who has a taste for truth. The Spirit heightens our awareness of being members of Christ’s family of God, for all are equal in the eyes of God.

The Spirit is an influence that works for peace and harmony as well as truth. Jesus said “the Spirit of Truth . . . will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13–14). He told them the Spirit would help them remember his words: “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

In a lot of ways, it is really a Jesus spirit. It reflects the generosity, the compassion, the openness that characterized Jesus himself. Jesus was friendly with Syrians, Romans, and Greeks. He ministered in the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21; Mark 7:24, 31). His openness to other cultures and peoples is going to be reflected in the Spirit he sent. Was he also open to their religious beliefs? I think he would have found them interesting, even while continuing to proclaim his own message of God as a loving, spiritual father. All the major religions have a kernel of truth, and Jesus would support all honest seekers of God.

Is it really possible that the Spirit that speaks of Jesus and reveals what distinctly belongs to him would also speak for tolerance of a diversity of religious thinking, as well as a diversity of races? Yes, I think so. Respect for honest religious motivation is one of Jesus’ characteristics. I think the Spirit of Truth can even encourage spiritual unity of purpose across religious boundaries. Jesus always honors every honest religious motivation. There was a scribe who asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, probably intending to entrap him with the question, but when Jesus comes back with the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself, the fellow agrees and says that this is greater than “all whole burnt-offerings,” and Jesus tells him “you are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). He responds to every sign of sincerity.

The Spirit bears testimony to the other religions, perhaps highlighting truths that those religions could accept. It is not the organized church that is a drawing force, but the noble and generous personality of the Master. We are a persuasive drawing force whenever we are true to Jesus himself. When we not only remember Jesus’ words but embody them, then we are spiritually attractive. Think of the values affirmed in the Beatitudes—gentleness, truth-hunger, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking—and imagine how powerful our testimony would be if we embodied all those qualities. Our love is our testimony to everyone.

Now, in *our* world, who are the Medes and Elamites whom *we* might meet, and what can we say to them? It could happen in the check-out line at the grocery store, and it may just mean being respectful. But you never know what opportunity may present itself, or when you might say something that is spiritually useful. We believe that the Spirit helps us to bring more of God’s truth and goodness into the world. Members of other religions will usually not object to such a statement. Examples of Christians who have served include those who founded hospitals, colleges, and orphans’ homes, serving those whom no one else was serving.

It is helpful for us to learn something about how people of other religions live their faith. It leads us to understand our own religious tradition better. It is helpful to notice how people recognize a moral law, and how they think of the divine presence, and how they speak of transcending the self for the sake of a higher value. We come to learn how values work in a human life and in society, how they can lead to understanding and compassion or to misunderstanding and prejudice.

As Christians, we are learning a lesson in both integrity and decency. We have our strong beliefs and our understanding of Jesus, but we can also practice being receptive to the honest expressions of faith from those who do not call themselves Christian. We are training ourselves to be both strong and kind. We have a strong faith, but we also seek peace with other religions. And “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9). The Spirit helps us be Jesus-like: merciful, meek, and peace-making.

Whenever we cooperate with the truth and beauty of God’s way and God’s Spirit, we are working for the kingdom of God. Can you find ways to speak the truth without condemning others’ beliefs? Can you be a Christian leader and also a peacemaker with those of other faiths? Can you be both an effective evangelist and a gracious disciple?

Go forward in partnership with God and in the brotherhood of humankind. Let the Spirit of Truth provide you insight so that you can see the Father more and more in your daily interactions with others.