

Pentecost & the AVID Program
Pentecost Sunday, 2014
Deacon Eric Johnson

- ✘ This past Wednesday I was at a meeting at the Anacortes High School that, for me, gave some clarity to the story of Pentecost (It'll take a little background explanation, but bear with me, please.)
- ✓ On Wednesday, 25 adults gathered in the school cafeteria. We met as mentors to next year's graduating class of seniors in the AVID program
- ✘ AVID (advancement via individual determination):
 - ✓ Program in which the elementary schools identify kids in the 6th grade who are making barely average grades...but they test at the highest level...Kids who may or may not graduate from HS, but would, if given the proper help, would do great in college
 - Why the disconnect?
 - Many come out of poverty:
 - ◆ Parents are working two full-time jobs and are not around to answer kid's questions about homework or to encourage them to do better
 - They also come from families who never have had anyone go to college, and the whole idea of college is too big, too expensive, too unknown
 - ✓ These kids are offered the opportunity to interview for and join the AVID program, 6-year program, (their elective program for six years):
 - Instead of a morning elective, they meet with their AVID teacher and their AVID tutor, and they
 - Are challenged to take more difficult classes, that will prepare them for college
 - Learn how to take notes using the Cornell note-taking system
 - Learn the timelines and milestones they need to meet to get scholarships
 - Take the school bus to in-state colleges, so it won't be as unfamiliar as it could be
 - Learn what's needed to be done in filling out the paperwork for student loans, and college applications and scholarships
 - ✓ And all this works just swell through the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th grade
 - But just as they go into their senior year, a lot of AVID students start to lose traction...and that's where us mentors enter the picture
 - Mentors are needed because just at the point where these kids are ready to step off into the great unknown, fear takes over
 - ◆ Fears put into them by their parents: "You're still thinking of going to college? Where are we going to get the money? Don't you realize how much that will cost? We'll never be able to afford it. What are you thinking?"

- ◆ Fear of being not good enough: I had to study so hard to catch up & I'll never be as good as those other kids
 - ◆ Fear that is expressed as, "Who do I think I am?"
- Mentors meet with the kids once a month from September through March (and more often through the emails)
 - We give a little extra push to accomplish those things that students, for one reason or another, would put into the "Too Hard to Accomplish Right Now" category
 - To help overcome some of the roadblocks that these kids see as preventing them in getting scholarships, or in getting admitted to school, or even in choosing a school that matches and challenges their talents and desires
 - To provide a reliable presence, someone outside of teachers and parents, someone who can provide some assurance about those things that the students are afraid of
- ✗ I think the disciples who were gathered "in one place" were much like AVID students:
 - ✓ Fisherman, laborers, tax collectors, women...those who lived in poverty; those who had been assigned their station in life
 - ✓ Like AVID kids, they had been through a three-year program of intensive study, listening and preparation,
 - And then, everything got confusing:
 - the cross, the resurrection, the departure of Jesus.
 - ◆ And when Jesus appeared to them for the last time, he said something they couldn't yet understand. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses" ([Acts 1:8](#)).
 - There expected something, but they didn't know what to expect.
- ✗ And they were afraid, just like AVID kids...
 - ✓ And the disciples had good reason to be afraid.
 - The Gospels make the story very clear.
 - Caiaphas says that it would be better for one man to die than for this thing to get out of hand and bring the power of the Roman Army down upon them all.
 - ◆ The priests and scribes had to maintain a very delicate political balance that could be upset very easily by rabble rousers.
 - ◆ The easiest solution is to do away with Jesus, and that, they hope, will crush a budding movement. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will run for cover.
 - ✓ Now with the departure of Jesus, the question is this:
 - Will the movement be ruled by fear?
 - Will the followers of Jesus just go back to Galilee and do what was expected of them? To be fishermen, and tax collectors and laborers and homemakers?
 - Pentecost's answer to this is: No.

- God will provide a mentor, a Comforter who will remind them that they went through all this training period, the death, resurrection and ascension...and all of this now makes sense and points them to what they should be doing in the future.
- ✘ One of the things that AVID kids learn, a thing that many adults never learn, is that there is a big community who is interested in them and who wants them to be successful.
 - ✓ That they are supported by a community of teachers, and tutors, and mentors, and service clubs with scholarships who love students who overcome adversity.
 - ✓ AVID kids learn that they are not going to be left alone to face an uncertain future.
- ✘ AVID kids learn that in community there is strength. And that's a lesson that the disciples learned at Pentecost.
 - ✓ The Spirit of God came to the people of God in community.
 - ✓ The Spirit is not something that came to each disciple as he/she was taking a quiet walk on the beach.
 - ✓ Instead we see them receiving the Spirit as they "were all together in one place."
 - God's spirit was poured out on a community of believers.
 - God's Spirit was not just for the privileged few; it was poured out on all the disciples.
 - And it wasn't a private affair: The Spirit's arrival came with special effects that drew together an interested public "from every nation" in amazement.
 - ✓ The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost points out that religion is meant to serve as a means of connecting people.
 - After all, the word "religion" comes from the Latin word, "religare," to be reconnected. Ligare: to connect...from which we get the word, "ligament."
 - At Pentecost and the disciples found the ability to make a connection to the peoples worldwide, as they spoke in the native tongues of the great arc of peoples from
 - Parthia, Media and Elam in present-day Iran
 - Mesopotamians from Iraq
 - Judah
 - Pontus and Capadocia in Turkey
 - Egypt, Rome, Libya, the Mediterranean island of Crete, Arabia
- ✘ And with all these connections among all these peoples, that's why I, as a religious person, have difficulty when people talk of spirituality being something personal.
 - "I'm spiritual, not religious." or, "My religion is private affair between me and God."
 - I can have a connection with God without having a connection to the wider community.
- ✓ However, it is only in the wider community that our beliefs are questioned and evaluated.
 - That is why we Episcopalians repeat our Baptismal vows four times each year (Easter Vigil, today, at Pentecost, All Saints Day, and the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord.)

- Our evaluation comes when we are asked,
 - ◆ Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
 - ◆ "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?"
 - ◆ Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
- Our Baptismal vow reminds us that, with religion, not only do we have a connection to God and ourselves, there is also the connection with others,
 - that we have an obligation to practice love towards our neighbors as well as ourselves.
- ✓ Striving for justice and peace and respecting the dignity of every human being is at the heart of our faith.
 - And if justice and peace are nowhere to be found in religion, the spiritual message it contains loses its credibility.
- ✗ And, finally, the good news for me in making an evaluation of these vows and in striving for justice and peace, is that being perfect is not a requirement.
 - ✓ That's one of the fears of AVID kids as well. "If I'm not good enough to go to Stanford, why should I bother going through all this. Maybe I'll just skip the SAT's and the big essay questions and just go to SVCC for a couple of years instead..."
 - ✓ The good news of Pentecost is that we don't have to be perfect.
 - We're reminded of this when the assembled people heard the disciples speak. They asked each other, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"
 - In other words, even though the disciples were speaking in the native language of their listeners, the disciples' Galilean accent still came through...Much like every Dutchman I spoke to in my time in the NL knew right away that I was from the USA, and after about five sentences, they knew I came from somewhere out west.
 - It reminds us that the language of the Spirit does not need to be communicated in perfect diction or in some sort of heavenly words, free from the marks of human identity.
 - God works in collaboration with real people, people who speak with a Galilean accent or one from West Texas
 - God works in collaboration with us,
 - ◆ Those of us who were filled with the Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation

- ◆ And as we repeat those Baptismal Vows may we be reminded again that we have been transformed from being those who are merely listeners of the word to those who are genuine ministers of the word.
- ✦ And by using the gifts that the Spirit has given us we can renew the face of the earth.