

Thirst quencher: John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

In the original Christian Pentecost are seeds of a universalist impulse, a catholic principle.

by [Maureen Dallison Kemeza](#) in the [April 24, 2002](#) issue

Never in my life has the violence in the Gospel of John seemed so recognizable. Now it corresponds to the daily news: a man fears going out in public in Jerusalem, as Jesus did on that festival of booths. This simple act can result in either glory or destruction, depending on whether “the street” murmurs disapproval or approbation. In a part of the world where religious and political identities are matters of life or death, the world of the gospel, so familiar and yet so distant, has never seemed more immediate. When Jesus cries out about water and belief, it is as though he stands caught in Jerusalem’s crosscurrents, his life at risk. Some of his listeners plot to get him and eventually they do, at least for a time. Nevertheless, there he stands, pure of heart and brave, prophetically teaching. “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. . . . ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

At this writing, people are thirsty inside the Palestinian Authority compound in Ramallah. They’re thirsty, too, in Bethlehem, where monks and nuns and men with guns are barricaded together in the Church of the Nativity. Thirsty too in the cities and towns of Israel, where people long to drink a cup of security instead of the bitter dregs of terror. If only, as in the postresurrection appearances, Jesus would pass through the walls dividing the Palestinians and the Israelis and speak again the resurrection greeting: Peace be with you.

Anything is possible, I believe, including a sudden appearance of the risen Lord. But since the first Christian Pentecost—or at least since the Enlightenment—that is not how Jesus has generally been manifest in the world. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the women and men and children empowered to carry on his ministry in the world. If there is to be peace in the Middle East, in Afghanistan or in the United States, it will come about through peacemakers whose grace and power flow from some explicit or implicit anointing by the Holy Spirit. For out of the believer’s heart

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The believer's heart? Some say that is the last place from which to expect any resolution of the terror wars, for it is the true believers, fundamentalists and hard-liners who are unable to compromise, preferring to die for their beliefs.

But notice what Jesus cries out. His invitation is particular and specific: Come to me; believe in me. Does that mean that we Christians should build higher walls around our faith and repair to some version of creedal orthodoxy to set us apart, and presumably above, our beleaguered and impassioned kin in the greater household of Abraham? I think not.

This is no invitation to harden our creedal boundaries or our hearts, but rather a call to repair ourselves to the sacred heart of Jesus, there to drink from the springs of reconciliation. There to learn again effective nonviolent responses to the warfare that flows from the hearts of men and women.

Jesus faced the tumult of the Holy Land undefended. He did not take up a sword, nor join the Zealots, nor even resist arrest. He did not call down the wrath of God on those who seized him, nor summon legions of angels to defend him from the soldiers. His response was nonviolent. Father, forgive them, he prayed. The triumph of the resurrection, then, is the triumph of nonviolent love over against war.

Pentecost follows, extending the promise of resurrection ever more widely. In Pentecost, the Spirit of the risen Lord rests on his followers. In the Acts of the Apostles, they discover in themselves something of Jesus' courageous generosity of heart. Their concern expands beyond the personal and the local, reaching out to residents of all the world. They speak to them in their own languages, with cultural barriers down, differences transcended. In the original Christian Pentecost are seeds of a universalist impulse, a catholic principle, that in these times drives us to engage the world in the spirit of nonviolent love.

That wide embrace of the universe as a sacrament of God is nourished by the pentecostal poetry of Psalm 104. When we are in danger of losing heart, we can remember:

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;

The earth is full of your creatures. . . .
These all look to you
To give them their food in due season; . . .
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

How are we to be loyal patriots of our beloved country and realistic in its defense, and yet faithful to the peace of Christ? The question and the challenge come around again. And once again, the answer is near. In Pentecost we find the energy, clarity and generosity of heart that are the wellsprings of living water. We are fundamentally and forever changed by the dying and rising of Christ, who entrusts his Holy Spirit to us. Because of Jesus' purity of heart and his courage, because he is the Prophet of the Most High sent to us, we will seek to find the way to do what in the world he would do.