

Year B, May 20, 2018
Pentecost
Christ Church, Mexia

When we were reading the scripture from Acts this morning in different languages, it may have seemed confusing to you. But the capabilities bestowed upon the disciples on this day were not meant to be confusing, they were meant to be helpful. It was necessary for them to be able to spread the gospel to all people – to be able to speak to them in their own language so that their chance of understanding would be enhanced – so that we all might be as one.

And what were they to tell them, share with them? Br. David Vryhof (SSJE) reminds us: “When Jesus came to live among us, his voice was a voice of comfort and of hope, a voice of love and assurance. He told us that God loved us and valued us. He lifted up the poor and gave them a special dignity.” That must sound good in any language! – don’t you think? David continues: “And so we who follow Jesus also take on this mission to the world. This is a mark of God’s love and a mark of our witness in the world, our work in the world, our vocation in the world – to challenge unjust structures that oppress and divide people, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation. Christ came to tear down the walls that divide us and he urges us to do the same – to reach across the racial, cultural, and the class divisions that separate us. To stop thinking in terms of ‘we’ and ‘them’ and to see the unity of all people, all of us created in God’s (wonderful and amazingly diverse) image, loved by God, and valued by God.”

Fr. Richard Rohr informs us that: “When religion is not about healing, it really does not have much to offer people in this life. Many have called such disembodied theology ‘carrot on the stick’ theology or, as my friend Brian McLaren says, we made the Gospel largely into ‘an evacuation plan for heaven.’ If we don’t understand the need and desire for healing now, then salvation (*salus*=healing) becomes a matter of hoping for some form of delayed gratification. We desperately need healing for groups, institutions, marriage, the wounds of war, abuse, race relations, and the endless social problems in which we are drowning today. But we won’t know how to heal if we never learn the skills at ground zero: the human heart.

Healing depends upon relating with love and compassion. Religion usually focuses on imputing and then forgiving guilt. This is much more about ‘sin management’ than it is about proclaiming a larger-

than-life vision for humanity.” Do we know how to proclaim a larger-than-life vision for the world?

While you ponder these thoughts, let me relate a story: It is the story of a twelve-year old boy in Kingston, Ontario, Canada and it happened one day in 1967. It involves a P-51 Mustang, a WWII fighter aircraft that helped us gain air superiority over the Germans. The pilot had stopped overnight en-route to an airshow in Montreal. When the pilot came that morning he interacted with the folks there as he readied the aircraft for take-off.

In the words of the boy, “We ran to the second story deck to see if we could catch a glimpse of the P-51 as she started down the runway. We could not. There we stood, eyes fixed on a spot half way down (runway) 19. Then a roar ripped across the field, much louder than before. Like a furious hell spawn set loose – something mighty this way was coming. In seconds the Mustang burst into our sight. Its tail was already off the runway and it was moving faster than anything I’d seen (before). Two-thirds of the way down 19 the Mustang was airborne with her gear going up. The prop tips were supersonic. We clasped our ears as the Mustang climbed...

As it disappeared into the haze, the air controller called the Mustang and told the pilot that he was free to make a low-level pass over the field - all of the people there hoping for an impromptu air show. The pilot acknowledged and asked for an east to west approach, which was enthusiastically granted.

“Moments later the P-51 burst through the haze. Her airframe straining against positive G’s and gravity. Her wing tips spilling contrails of condensed air... The burnished bird blasted across the eastern margin of the field shredding and tearing the air. At about 500 mph and 150 yards from where we stood she passed with the old American pilot saluting. Imagine. A salute! I felt like laughing; I felt like crying; she glistened; she screamed; the building shook; my heart pounded. Then the old pilot pulled her up and rolled and rolled... out of sight into the broken clouds and indelible in my memory. I’ve never wanted to be an American more than on that day!” America seemed to me to be like the old pilot – he was proud, not arrogant; humble, not a braggart; old and honest, projecting an aura of America at her best. The pilot, by the way, was the late Jimmy Stewart.

But what does this story have to do with us – with today’s lessons? How did you feel hearing the description of the event by the man who

lived it? Wouldn't it be fantastic, if by our lives and our love and our ability to help people heal, that someone, today or in the future, could have such an incredible experience, feel this type of emotion, and want to be a Christian, be a part of our church? That's what Jesus' church is about. That's what we should be about.

Happy Birthday to Jesus' church!

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.