

**BREAD IN EACH HOUSE**  
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Our Scripture Lesson this week, from the Book of Acts, takes place on the Day of Pentecost.

In the Christian tradition, of course, we associate the Day of Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church.

In the Jewish tradition, however, the Day of Pentecost is all about BREAD.

The festival harkens back to the Exodus from Egypt and the journey to the land of promise and plenty. It is the story of God's providence told over and over by first century Jews, and even to this day in twenty-first century Judaism.

Once the ancient Israelites are safely out of Egypt, the story goes, all hell breaks loose. There is no bread. There is no meat. There is no wine. There is no water.

The people are desperate.

But they are also blind.

Manna from heaven has fallen from the sky. All you have to do every morning is take what you need and leave the rest. It's not the kind of bread you were used to in Egypt, God says to Moses, who then tells the people. But it will keep you alive on the journey.

Here is the thing I am trying to teach you, God says to Moses, who then tells the people: if you take too much of this new kind of bread, it will rot. Hoarding stinks! But if you take just enough, all will be fed. Which is how I want you to live together, God says to Moses, who then tells the people, once you get to the land of promise plenty.

How God wants the people to live together once they come to the land of promise and plenty is also the subject of the commandments God gives to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai. The Big Ten we know, of course. But there are so many more.

One of those commandments is to observe the festival of Pentecost. With ... wait for it ... bread! Pentecost, it turns out is a festival gathering to celebrate the harvest of the grains: barley and wheat to be exact.

By the time we get to first century Judaism, Pentecost has become one of three pilgrimage festivals in the Jewish liturgical year. Pilgrim families come from all across Judea and into the Mediterranean. They make their way to the Jerusalem temple, where they recite the story of the ancient Israelite journey to the land of promise and plenty, remember the providence of God in the daily gift of manna, and making an offering two loaves of bread from the fruits of the harvest they are celebrating.

Pentecost is supposed to be a great party!

The problem is, by the time we get to our lesson in the Book of Acts most of the pilgrim families have become dispossessed from the land on which the harvest is reaped. In the language of modern-day economics, the land has been commercialized. Owned by outside interests across the Mediterranean. Most of them Greek, but many of them Jew. And the people who remain have become tenant farmers on their own land.

Twenty percent of the people – again, mostly across the Mediterranean, most of them Greek, but many of them Jew – live extravagantly well. They have the means to import wheat and barley and every other kind of crop from this “Fertile Crescent” the land of promise and plenty has become. They are hoarding. And hoarding stinks! It leaves a full eighty percent of the people to live at or below a subsistence level. (There is no middle class to speak of in this time.)

So when the Festival of Pentecost arrives, in first century Jerusalem, as the apostles of the risen Christ continue their mission, roughly eighty percent of the pilgrims are praying for bread with which to make their meager offering. And roughly twenty percent of the pilgrims have so much bread they have to hire servants to carry it all.

What are the apostles of Jesus to do?

They do what we all should do: they gather, and they pray.

And, as often happens, at least in my experience, the Holy Spirit, herself, rushes in to lead the way, equipping the apostles to share the story of Jesus with the gathering Pentecost Pilgrims in whatever language those pilgrims speak. The Holy Spirit equips the apostles to share with the Pentecost Pilgrims how Jesus had inspired them to leave all they had in order to teach and preach the good news of God’s kin-dom, where all are fed and all are forgiven and all are healed. The Holy Spirit equips the apostles to share with the Pentecost Pilgrims how Jesus taught them to share the bounty of the earth – disregarding the heresy of absentee landownership – with up to 4000 and 5000 people at a time.

The Apostle Peter is more direct than the others. He chastises the crowd for allowing the crucifixion of Jesus to happen, just seven weeks before. But then Paul encourages the people with stories of the risen Christ, made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Pentecost People are transformed by Peter’s message. They want to be part of the kin-dom of God where all are fed and all are forgiven, and all is made well! They want to be part of the open table that Jesus began! So they join the Jesus Movement in droves. 3000 in one day! They devote themselves to the teaching of manna and mercy. They devote themselves to a life of prayer. They devote themselves to the *koinōnia* community of Christ: living in solidarity with “the least of these” in their midst.

In devoting themselves to these things, those who are part of the twenty percent “get religion”: they hunger and thirst for justice. They sell all they have, and they let the apostles share it with the eighty percent.

And the apostles, God bless them, go house to house to house with all of the extra loaves of bread and all the extra food the twenty percent brought back to the Fertile Crescent from which it came. And a new community is formed: the *koinōnia* community of Christ. A true demonstration of the kin-dom of God, provisional though it turns out to be: where all the people, eighty percent and twenty percent alike, eat their food with glad and generous hearts. Praising God. And having the goodwill of all the people.

So, my friends, preparing for a Pentecost pilgrimage of our own, right here in our homes, here we are: in the midst of a global pandemic that has laid bare the inexcusable inequalities of the modern world in which we live. Praying for God to show us how to “show up” in the radical hospitality, holistic spirituality, and engaged compassion of Jesus.

And I will venture a guess that the Holy Spirit is still at work in what feels like “last days” of our own: rushing into our homes, instead of in our temples. Equipping us, the twenty-first century apostles of the risen Christ, to

proclaim in any language the good news of God's kin-dom. Where all are fed. And all are forgiven. And all are healed.

And I will venture a guess that the Spirit is equipping us to shout from the rooftops, in the spirit of Sophia Tuzzio's opening prayer:

"Some have bread. And some have none. God bless the revolution!"

Amen.