

gions, Jewish or pagan. And it's *certainly not* a smooth ride without any conflicts, even if Luke probably did give a best-case-scenario version of events. Ananias and Sapphira lie about their generosity and are struck down dead. Simon Magus believes and gets baptized, and then tries to buy the Holy Spirit off the apostles. Paul has conflicts with John Mark, with Barnabas, with the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia — well, honestly, with just about everybody. And there are plots to kill around every corner. This, too, is a story marked by the cross.

The point of Acts is that the arms that were once stretched out on the cross will reach round the whole known world, and even farther, until every tribe, nation, and people comes to know in whose name salvation and forgiveness of sins are offered. The unfinished ending of Acts, rather like the unfinished ending of Mark, invites readers and hearers to fill in the blanks with their own repentance, faith, and witness.

Even the Jewish-only Pentecost of Acts 2 foreshadows this. The diaspora Jews gathered back in the homeland are from so many other nations by now that they have lost a common language. But the Spirit does not make them all able to speak the *same* language again; instead, the Spirit makes them all able to understand in their *new* native tongues. Ingathering does *not* mean homogenizing. It means finding out that exactly where you're not at home, you're home, because the temple of the Spirit travels everywhere.

A mixed community is not a natural thing, nor is it easy. It's hard enough to negotiate the conflicting communities of men and women that are inevitably found everywhere (Gal. 3:28), and integrating the socioeconomically diverse has been causing trouble ever since the love feasts of 1 Corinthians 11:18–22. So much the more so, then, where there is no common language, common culture, or common color to give some natural sense of mutual belonging.

But that's just it: a church is *not* a natural gathering. There's nothing wrong with such groupings of affinity per se, but they're not the church. Left alone, natural groupings will almost certainly turn tribal, suspicious, and violent. Leavened by the word of God and inhabited by the Spirit, however, they will learn to hallow daily life and family, work and food, for the enrichment of world and Church alike. It is indeed confusing, time-consuming, and costly to forge a Church out of the mixing of many nations. As Ephraim Radner observes, "The laws of mixing are Pentecostal in their gathering of tongues; they are also Golgothic

in their cost" (*Leviticus*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [2008], p. 215). We see that in Acts, and I learned it at St. Alban's. But in that very costliness we meet with the new creation that is the Church. Readers looking for a primer on the non-natural Church can do no better than Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic *Life Together*.

It turns out that curiosity about the wider world and its peoples is not a personal predilection but a calling of the Holy Spirit to every Christian in every locale. The Church is all these nations gathered in, purified of parochialism in the waters of baptism. Participating in this costly mixing is not a privilege only of those living in globalized cities; a closer look at any human community shows that there are always outsiders living on the inside. Even such apparently alike communities as Norwegian and Swedish immigrants in the upper Midwest can find themselves called to struggle through the task of Pentecostal coexistence. I've heard the tales!

And this *is* at heart a theological task, not merely a civic one. It demands the continual recognition that we are not gathered around font, table, or word by the convenience of sociological similarity but by the Spirit urging us toward

repentance and faith. That realization alone is enough to unmake and remake many a congregation. I had the joy of accompanying St. Alban's for a few years as it wrestled with this unmaking and remaking. And once I was able to repay my debts to the congregation by leading a Bible study on Acts, sharing the very wisdom I had learned from my time there.

True, I wasn't always crazy about the hymns with their Victorian poetry and dragging melodies. And preaching to a theologian is a thankless task. But I'd have quibbles anywhere, and they are unworthy of the spiritual drama unfolding in worship. Each week at Communion we would all stand in a huge ring around the altar. As the body and blood were distributed, I'd make a point

of looking around the circle, at each face and body, one by one, seeing the nations that the Spirit had already started gathering up in Acts; seeing the nations that will assemble around the Lamb in the New Jerusalem; seeing Christ's body, our people, my home.

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