

The Lutheran Church of the Atonement  
Florissant, Missouri  
The Festival of Pentecost -- Year A  
Memorial Day Weekend  
May 27-28, 2023  
Numbers 11:24-30; Acts 2:1-21  
St. John 20:19-23

It's a moment that still makes me smile. Back in the 1970s, when I was still working for ELIM, the moderate movement within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, ELIM would offer a worship opportunity for like-minded Lutherans at a site nearby the convention center where the LCMS would be holding its biennial convention. The year that the convention was here in St. Louis, we held our service at the magnificent Christ Church Cathedral on 13<sup>th</sup> Street. One of the Scriptures selected for this service was today's Second Lesson from Acts, the story of the first Christian Pentecost. But, at the suggestion of Pastor Adam Mead, we didn't just ask someone to read the Lesson. Instead, we positioned various people throughout the sanctuary, each with his or her line to read, as though they were part of the first Pentecost crowd. So, for example, when we got to that long list of geographic place names, someone would stand up and shout, "Mesopotamia," and someone else would stand up and shout, "Judea," and someone else "Cappadocia, "Pontus," and "Phrygia," and "Pamphylia," and so forth.

So, even though my Dad was not a huge ELIM supporter, he was coming to the service, so I prevailed on him to read one line. And, I can still picture him standing up in the middle of the sanctuary and, in a voice which could be heard throughout the cathedral, intoning, "These men are filled with new wine." It still makes me smile.

"These men are filled with new wine." Now, this was said by those mocking the disciples in an attempt to discredit them. But, if you notice Peter's response he doesn't exactly deny it. He merely says that they're "not drunk, as you are suggesting."

Could it be that they were, in fact, "filled with new wine"? Or, as the Greek says, with γλεῦκος, with "sweet wine"? For, Peter begins immediately to quote from the Prophet Joel and to remind the crowd of how the Prophet Joel had understood the inauguration of the Messianic Age, the age when God would remember His promises, would restore His people, and would renew the earth. And, Peter, no doubt, believes that this Pentecost crowd, made up of devout and Scripturally-savvy Jews would instantly remember that, in the book of Joel, the sign of God's judgment against the people would be that "the sweet wine" would be "cut off from your mouth," but that the day of restoration would likened to a time when "the vats would overflow with new wine." Put simply, in Joel, "sweet new wine" becomes a metaphor, both for the time of God's judgment and for "the last days" when God would keep His promises to Israel and would send His Spirit upon all people.

This is a metaphor not lost on Jesus. When disciples of John the Baptist and disciples of the Pharisees challenged Jesus as to why His own disciples did not follow the prescribed traditions of fasting on the appointed days, "new wine" was one of the two metaphors Jesus used to describe how the old order was passing away and God's new thing was, even now, being inaugurated. God was now doing His new thing. God's Messianic Age was now dawning. God's Kingdom was now breaking in. This was a time to celebrate, not to fast. Indeed, everything for which God's people had fasted and prayed was now coming to pass in the ministry of Jesus. And, the image from Joel's prophecy may surely have come to mind. "No-one," Jesus says, "pours new wine into old wineskins for the wineskins will burst, and both the wine and the wineskins will be lost." Don't take the new thing that God is doing and try to jam-fit it into your old ways of doing things, into your old suppositions about how God is

supposed to deal with the world, into your old notions of what God's Messiah would be sent to accomplish.

And, perhaps, at the wedding of Cana, Jesus even remembered that Joel's prophecy of "vats overflowing with new wine" would be a sign of the coming of God's Messianic Age, when God would make all things new -- and no-one would be put to shame.

Indeed, so much of what Jesus was now doing was new -- almost revolutionary. Jesus gathers His disciples not from the finest rabbinic finishing schools, but from the ranks of hard-working tradesmen, whose education probably stopped at age 13. He touches and heals lepers, considered sinful outsiders at best. He forgives a paralytic and then heals him, actions previously reserved only for God. He socializes with tax collectors, most of whom were despised by their communities. He shares table fellowship with prostitutes and other social outcasts -- and it is there that He is asked why He and His disciples aren't fasting instead.

And, His answer is as simple as it is straightforward. This is the age of God's "sweet new wine." This is the age of God's "sweet new wine" of forgiveness for all who turn back to God. This is the age of God's "sweet new wine" of welcome to the outcast, of healing for the brokenhearted, and of comfort for the grieving. This is the age of God's "sweet new wine," when ceremony, ritual, and privilege give way to changed and honest hearts. This is the age when God's "sweet new wine" is being poured into new wineskins, ...new wineskins like you and me.

Today, on Pentecost, we celebrate the outpouring of God's Spirit "upon all flesh." And as that same Spirit is poured out on us, may we -- as the Spirit gives us the ability -- speak of God's deeds of power, especially as these are shown forth in the ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. May we -- as the

Spirit gives us the ability -- offer forgiveness to the troubled, welcome to the outcast, healing to the brokenhearted, and comfort to the grieving. May we -- as the Spirit gives us the ability -- speak of "the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day, when everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." And, as we do so, may we not be offended, as others look on us and intone, "They are filled with new wine."

Amen