

## PENTECOST GATHERING

Acts 2:1-18

May 15 2016 (Pentecost Sunday)

When we read all that stuff about Jesus at odds with the religious folk of his day, we might be tempted to think that it's all just history.

But it still goes on – even now.

The Pharisees and Teachers of the law that sparred with Jesus are still to be seen in every generation.

Sometimes today they will describe themselves as  
respectful Catholics,  
good Protestants,  
orthodox Christians,  
Bible-believing Christians,  
evangelical Christians,  
born-again Christians,  
or even faithful Church of Scotland members.

The label can be almost anything.

But the Spirit of the Pharisees can still be seen in church as people try to work out what the gospel is for them and how we should be living as Christians.

It's one of the things we have to grapple with just as Jesus did in his day.

There's an ongoing struggle between the faith that Jesus proclaimed and the religious system that is attached to him.

You never know when something will crop up to remind you of this.

I came across a Christian website called 'A Pilgrim's Friend.'

It's run by a guy called Dana Dill. Who is he?

Well here he is on the screen – a good looking guy with a good looking wife and family.

In his words, he is a *"Joyful slave of Jesus. Happy husband of Chawna. Delighted father of Daisy. Thankful Youth Pastor of South Shores Church, California. Friend of Pilgrims."*

I was kind of struck by an article he has written for 'A Pilgrims Friend'.

The friendly title of his piece is this: **'NOT EVERYONE IS GOD'S CHILD.'**

Let me read his exact opening words....

*'People like to say, "**Everyone is a child of God.**" However, although this statement makes its way into American religious-sentimentality, it is not what the Bible teaches.*

*The Bible is clear that, far from being God's beloved children, all people are born as His enemies with a great hatred for Him and His rule.*

*What is God's response to Mankind's sinful, rebellious hatred?*

*Wrath!*

*God **hates** those who hate what is good.*

*God **hates** those who hate Him (Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5).*

*Ephesians 2:3 says it clear as day, outside of the grace of God in Jesus, all people are "by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind." Those who rebel against God in their sin are not children of God's kindness, but children of His wrath.*

*However, here is where the gospel becomes unbelievably good...'*

So what happens? What's the good bit....

If you accept Jesus as your Saviour, all the bad things you have done are cancelled, and God's wrath for you gets set to one side. God doesn't hate you any more because of what you have done.

But by the way, God still hates everyone else who haven't accepted Jesus like you did.

This piece of writing (which is a brutal piece of writing) corresponds with a kind of Christianity some of us grew up with, and some of are breaking free from.

Why did we ever believe stuff like it?

Why does this guy Dana Dill believe it?

Two reasons..

First of all, because that's what we were told.

This is the story we were told, growing up.

This was how Christianity was described to us.

We've been told that this, basically, is the message of Christianity.

And secondly, because in this version of faith there are actually kernels of truth.

There is *some* truth in there.

But the truth has been twisted and distorted, to become something different.

I am going ask you to use some imagination now.

Imagine that you have a wee daughter. And her name is EVA.

Suppose I come up to you and said, *"Your daughter Eva is a sinner."*

My statement will be correct.

It might not be a particularly nice thing to say or very friendly - but it will be true.

Because a 'sinner' is someone who is not perfect – someone who makes mistakes who sometimes does bad stuff - and we **all** do that.

So Eva is a sinner.

But is that how you think of her?

Is that how you speak about her?

Is that the most important fact about her?

Is that the first thing that comes into your head when you think of your daughter?

Or is it not the case that you love your daughter and think she's wonderful.

Sure, sometimes Eva may do things that are naughty or say things that you don't agree with. Sure, she may even do things that make you angry or disappointed, and sure she is not perfect, and no human is, but you love her to bits and want only the best for her.

You love her. That is your default position with your daughter.

For some Christians like Dana, Gods default position towards human beings is wrath.

Anger!

God hates us.

The only thing that will make God change Gods mind is if we become followers of Christ.

It brings us to another 'true' thing – following Christ.

Is that not important then? Of course it is!

But the reason we follow Jesus is not because we are going to be sent to the 'bad fire' if we don't, it's not because God hates us if we don't – it's because Jesus has the best way to life and we'll be missing out if we don't, and Jesus tells us that God loves us beyond our deserving.

If God basically hates human beings then our motivation to draw near to God and to do what God wants is fear - not love.

It's negative and not positive.

But, if God basically loves human beings then our motivation to draw near to God and to do what God wants is love - and not fear.

It's positive and not negative.

And that makes all the difference in the world.

Yes we are sinners – but God still loves us.

Yes we should follow Jesus - because God wants the very best for us.

So here we are then, together on Pentecost Sunday.

What on earth has this got to do with today?

Today we remember this moment when the Holy Spirit was given to the first Christians, and we read about it in a story that we can scarcely picture.

A mighty wind, tongues of fire..

This is an attempt to describe something that cannot properly be described in words.

There is a noise that **sounded like** a strong wind blowing.

Then they saw something that **looked like** tongues of fire.

But one of the things that happens – one of the signs on that day, was to do with languages.

People often think this is to do with what is called '*speaking in tongues*', but it's not got anything to do with that – there's a subject for another day!

What happened on the day of Pentecost was that people from around the world found themselves being addressed in their own native language, by people who had never before learned that language.

It was a giant linguistic miracle!

Whenever I go on holiday abroad and try to address people in their native language, I don't do too well. Doesn't matter how often I go on holiday, I never do too well.

What's the problem?

It's me, every time. I have never properly learned any other language.

But on the Day of Pentecost the followers of Jesus found themselves just for a small moment in time, able to speak in languages they had never learned, and able to make themselves understood.

Now whenever we come across something unrepeatable like this in the Bible, what we need to do is not try to work out what happened at that moment (as if we could!) but instead to ask: what does this all mean?

What is the point of this in the story?

And the point was that God was breaking down the barriers between people and showing the world that God is there for all of us,

whether we are male or female,

Jew or Gentile,

local or foreigner,

rich or poor.

Pentecost marks the end of shutting people out and the beginning of a movement for drawing people in.

It was a way of drawing attention to the fact that God's love, care and concern is for all of us – not just some of us.

God's attitude towards people is not that of hatred or wrath or even indifference. God's attitude towards people is love.

God's great mission on earth is to gather us in, and let us all know that we belong.

Because we are all God's children.

And when Dana Dill writes "***Not everyone is God's child***", he couldn't be more wrong.