

Installation Sermon: A New Pentecost
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Veni creator Spiritus...As we gather for this 95th Divinity School convocation, I must begin with words of gratitude. To President Price and Provost Kornbluth for entrusting me with the direction of this school. To Bill and Renie McCutchen for supporting my work with the Center for Reconciliation. To my colleagues in the Divinity School administration, faculty and staff; you make working in this place a means of grace. To our students, thank you for answering God's call and coming here. You are signs of hope to the school, the church, and me. I am particularly appreciative for those who are participating in this Convocation Service from a distance, to our students in the hybrid programs *y a mis estudiantes, hermanos y hermanas en América Latina. Cristo vive. De verdad, vive.* To my family and friends, thank you for making the journey and being here. Finally, I give God thanks for my wife, Cathleen. It is because of her that I joined the Methodist Church, heard the call to ministry, and came to Duke University.

We begin a new academic year at a very dense moment in history. The masks tell a part of our tale. We are still in the age of pandemic, in the seemingly unending time between pre-covid and post-covid. How much has changed since we last met in this chapel for an opening convocation, births and deaths, weddings and divorces, arrivals and departures! Yesterday, I was in this Chapel for a memorial service for one of our recent grads, Miriam Cho. Dr. Jerusha Neal preached a sermon based on a sermon preached by Miriam from a text by the prophet Joel, a portion of the text preached by Peter in Acts on the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord is a day of locusts and green shoots. What an apt description for our day. A day of endings and beginnings, a day when the US military presence in Afghanistan ends leaving behind broken bodies, hearts, and dreams. In particular, I carry in my heart today the veterans among us who are wondering what was it all for and the Afghan people wondering what comes next.

It is the density of these historical realities that I will seek to illumine with the words of scripture. This morning, I want us to consider this basic fact, our service of convocation and installation, our academic year are happening in the season after Pentecost but the Holy Spirit is not finished with us. A new Pentecost is urgent, possible, and promised.

Today's liturgical colors are red because without Pentecost, there would be no convocation. We would not be able to sing "Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit, into ev'ry troubled breast" and acknowledge the burdens we bring with us. We would not be able to pray "cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit" and thus we would be unable to magnify God's holy name. Without Pentecost, we would not be able to profess that "we believe in Jesus Christ our Lord" because No one can say Jesus Christ is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Without Pentecost, we would leave this place without the blessing of the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Without Pentecost, we would only know the world according to Babel. Many have noted the similarities between the story of Babel and the day of Pentecost. The stories share common elements: a great diversity of nations, a multiplicity of languages. Often Pentecost is described as the reversal of Babel, but this identification is not quite on point. The Holy Spirit does not erase linguistic diversity. The Holy Spirit brought understanding into a confused world.

In the world according to Babel, language is a tool of empire and domination. Examples abound. This is the world where Franco attempted to consolidate his power over Spain by mandating that only one language be spoken "Spanish," and making the speaking of Catalán, Galician or Basque a criminal offense. Micah understood the world according to Babel. It is a world where words are weaponized; a world where ideas are sharpened to cut people down. We know this world. To our misfortune, it is a world familiar to those who follow Capitol Hill

politics and news media punditry. To our shame, it is a reality present in the academy and in the church. This is the world in which the psalmist cries “Confuse o Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city.” Micah dreamed of a different world. He dreamed of a world where swords and spears are decommissioned; a world where schools curriculums help people unlearn war, where schools offer certificates in social justice sowing, where what is cutting edge is used to break hardened ground in order to plant for a better future, where the symphony of doctrine unites rather than divide. Micah dreamed of a world beyond Babel.

I recently learned that the Divinity School worked together with the Pratt School of Engineering and the Kenan Center for Ethics in developing an initiative that promoted thinking around meaning, purpose and ethics in engineering. I cannot help thinking, what if my engineering school at Cornell had had a program like this? I might still be an engineer. Because though I had grown up dreaming of being an aerospace engineer, the military applications of the technology during the Cold War concerned me and my program did not make room for discussions of moral ends. In the Pratt Purposefully Duke Initiative, I sense a longing for a world arranged in a logic different than that of Babel. A new Pentecost is urgent.

In the world according to Babel, cultures and languages are ranked. Some cultures and languages are deemed more scientific than others. Some accents are considered more educated than others. In the time of the Apostles, the Galilean accent was distinctive. Peter is recognized as a follower of Jesus because of his Galilean accent. According to theologian Virgil Elizondo, people from Galilee slurred hard consonant sounds in ways that made them sound provincial and uneducated. I am not sure if this is true, but scripture tells us that reputable Israelites like Nathanael had a very low opinion for what good could come out of the borderlands of Galilee.

Pentecost proved him wrong. On that day, the disciples of Jesus, all 120 of them I believe, were gathered together in one place, en conjunto, waiting on God’s promises to be fulfilled. Before Pentecost, they were Galileans. After Pentecost, even as they received the gift of languages beyond their level of education, they were still recognizably Galileans. What does this mean? It means that the Spirit being poured on all flesh does not wash away it free from particularity. The Holy Spirit purifies speech, but it does not burn off accents.

Students, you came to Duke Divinity because you know that the world according to Babel is not God’s preferred world. You came here to learn how to proclaim the *magnalia Dei* in new theological languages. We want you to study Hebrew and Greek. We want you to learn new words like homoousios. We want you to learn new practices: Biblical exegesis, preaching, worship leadership, pastoral care. We do not want you to lose your accent. Do not be afraid of speaking with your accent. Do not be afraid of learning from new accents. Do not be afraid of sitting under your own fig tree and drinking from your own wells even as you discover new wells and find new shady trees in the traditions of our mothers and fathers in the faith and our sisters and brothers around the world. The world according to Babel needs to be turned upside down. A new Pentecost is urgent.

A new Pentecost is possible. In Peter’s Pentecost sermon, he interprets the events of the day by appealing to Joel’s prophecy. The day had come when the Spirit would be poured on all flesh and young and old would see visions and dream dreams. As the story of the book of Acts unfolds, the prophesying and dreaming continues. There is Peter on the rooftop of the house of Simon the Tanner receiving a vision of the goodness of the diversity of creation. There are the young women, the four daughters of Philip, who had the gift of prophecy. I have news for you. These gifts are not ones that are taught at the Divinity School. We do not control the Spirit. What we can do is teach you where the Spirit has blown before and which places tend to be windy even today, so that you can be when the Spirit to ride the breath of the third person of the Trinity. In other words, we can teach you a Pentecost view of the world.

Over the summer, as I was preparing to begin my service as Dean, I came across a story of John Henry Newman dining with a certain Dean, whose name I have already forgotten. Newman found the experience to be pleasant but frustrating. The Dean was affable and cultured in his own way but lacked any firm and founded convictions. Instead of having considered views on important things, he had settled on what Newman called a superficial “viewiness.” The result was that both the Dean and his institution were like a ship without a rudder. I read this as a cautionary tale. I do not want to be known for promoting viewiness or truthiness. I do not want the Divinity School being known in this way either. Instead, I long for our academic and vocational formation to be known for cultivating a Pentecost vision of God, the church, and the world. We form this vision by engaging in practices like close reading and analytical thinking. Basically, we are try to help you develop habits of slowing down and going deep. However, it is not only the practices that contribute to developing a Pentecost vision. What and how you read and write matters. Where and with whom you read and write matters too.

Latin American theologians contrast theology done from the balcony (teología del balcón) with theology done from the way (teología del camino). The contrast echoes the experience of religious processions in Latin America. Some people view the unfolding drama from the balconies of their residence. Others experience it from the midst of the procession. Theology from the balcony is theology from above. The theologians are spectators. They have an excellent view of all that happens below, but they are not in the thick of the action. Theology from the way is different. It is practiced from street level. The theologian of the way is a pilgrim who is sometimes swept up by the movement of the people. The Divinity School is a balcony, but a new Pentecost is possible because this balcony has a staircase going down to the street.

Fred Herzog, who taught theology at Duke many years ago, made an observation that still haunts me. After reading a book mapping the currents of theological education, he noted that the term “poor” did not appear in the book once. This roadmap bypassed whole communities as insignificant to the story. By contrast, Herzog said, the peripheries and margins are the cardinal points for God’s action in the world today. A new Pentecost is possible because the poor and the oppressed are still with us and God still hears their cry. The balconies and penthouses need to be changed, the streets and alleyways need to be transformed, but trickle down academics will not work. The jet stream of the Holy Spirit runs through Galilee and the borderlands of today.

As many of you know, I have been involved with a program that trains pastors in Central America for more than a decade. One of our practices is to pack the whole teaching and student body into buses and vans for a field teaching experience. On one occasion, we moved the school to a remote border crossing point between El Salvador and Guatemala. The sight of around 60 people disembarking at this place was unusual enough to attract the attention of the guards. We explained that we were there to teach a class in the public park at the border. The guards allowed it, but to the disappointment of some of our students, they made it clear that no one could cross the border bridge without the proper documentation. Moreover, the guards, armed with automatic rifles, surrounded our group and kept a close eye on us while the class transpired. The topic for our class was eschatology, the last things. We began by singing the hymn sung earlier in the service “Tenemos esperanza.” As we discussed the imagery in the vision of Micah, the border guards listened intently; some nodded approvingly. I am not sure when it happened but by the time that our class ended, the guards had opened the border and allowed free movement back and forth. The bridge connecting the two countries became a selfie spot. Both sides of the border became a place for fiesta. A new Pentecost is possible!

Can this happen at a Divinity School at an R1 university? I will admit that Pentecosts are not common at modern universities. It is hard to imagine the Asuza Street Revival which sparked the modern Pentecostal movement starting at Cornell, my alma mater. “Far above Cayuga’s

waters with its tongues of flame” does not quite work. Even so, a new Pentecost is urgent and possible. A new Pentecost started at the University of Oxford in the eighteenth century, when a few young students rediscovered the power of the Bible, the richness of early Church practices, and the importance of visiting prisons. The result was the beginning of the Methodist movement. A new Pentecost started at the University of Central America in San Salvador when the leadership opened the windows and doors of their institution to the winds of the Spirit blowing through Latin America carrying the cries of the poor. The result was the martyrdom of key administrators, teachers, and staff. In the third century, Tertullian spoke of the Holy Spirit as the “coach of the martyrs.” In the twentieth century, the Salvadoran martyrs proved this to be true.

A new Pentecost is possible at the Divinity School of Duke University. What does this mean? It means opening our minds and hearts to a new visitation of the Spirit. It means revisiting the Pentecost Window at the top of the Westbrook Building in the Divinity School and seeing our community in the image of the dove, the flames, and the people. Faculty and staff, it can happen. We only need to raise our students high. They are the sails that fill up when the wind of the Spirit blows from the places of marginality near and far. Students, we need you to stretch to catch as much wind as you can. A new Pentecost is urgent; it is possible; it is promised. We may be still living with Covid in a world according to Babel, but a new Pentecost is promised and the end is the day of the great fiesta.

I began with an invocation of the Holy Spirit from the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*. In some traditions, this hymn is often sung in ordinations and at the opening of special church gatherings. For me, this prayer gives voice to the hope of the people of God: a new Pentecost is promised. The day is coming when we shall hear the Spirit and the bride say “come”. This has been the day that I have longed for from the day that I graduated from Divinity School and began to pastor here in Durham to the day of my installation as Dean. On that day, early in the morning, our song shall rise to the Lord God almighty, as we join the everlasting chorus, with our languages, with our accents singing: Holy, holy, holy, qadosh, qadosh, qadosh, hagios, hagios, hagios, santo, santo, santo, all the saints adore thee, cherubim and seraphim, Asians and Americans, brown and black, citizens and refugees, rural and urban, falling down before thee, which wert, and art and ever more shall be.