

THE COLOUR OF LOVE

Acts 2: 1-21

Imagine what life would be like without colour. Colour is not only about what we see. Colour is also about how we think and feel. Colour is what makes life interesting, a little less routine and a little more unpredictable. Imagine if we knew everything that was going to happen and how exactly it was going to happen. There would be nothing more to do but sleep permanently through life! Colour is about movement and change, growth, development, and evolution. Colour is also what adds height and depth to life. Whether it's the elation we feel after some significant achievement or the excitement of participating in some great event, or whether it's the feeling we get when we listen to a great piece of music or behold a wonderful work of art, colour adds spice to life. Whether it's about the way others make us feel or whether it's the way we are able to make others feel, colour is about the complex as well as fulfilling dimensions of relationships in life and the world. Yes, colour makes life a lot more complicated, and sometimes we may want less of it in our lives. But let's face it, without colour in our lives we might as well be dead.

The church, too, has discovered the truth about colour. Colour is a great way of expressing the drama of our relationship with God and God's relationship with us. This is why the church year is not only broken down into seasons following the life of Christ. Each season also has a colour associated with it (a colour we mark with our pulpit falls).

The church year begins in late fall with Advent - the preparation for the birth of Jesus - followed by Christmas. And then, following the new year we move into the season of Epiphany which commences with Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan and the beginning of his public ministry of teaching and healing. Then as we move to spring, we begin the season of Lent which is a time of preparation for Jesus' way to the cross and his suffering, suffering because of human sin and brokenness, and also the suffering of his forgiving and letting go of this sin so that a doorway is opened toward healing and reconciliation. Then comes Easter and the season of Easter which mark Jesus' resurrection beyond death and victory over the powers of darkness. And finally, we arrive at Pentecost and the season of Pentecost marking the gift of the Holy Spirit on all who open their hearts to the movement and flow of the divine.

But all of this would be rather flat were we not also to have some visual and conceptual symbols based on colour. Purple, for instance, is the colour of passion in the form of suffering, inner struggle, and preparation. Advent is a time where we prepare ourselves inwardly for the birth of Jesus in our hearts, and it is also a time when we consider the suffering in the world anticipating the birth of a saviour. Lent is a time of inward preparation for the death and resurrection of Jesus and our own commitment to his way.

But it is also a time of struggle as we seek to repent, to forgive and to surrender our lives to God in ever deeper ways.

Green, on the other hand, is a colour that symbolizes life and growth. The season of Epiphany is a time where we listen to the teaching of Jesus and open ourselves to his healing power for our lives. The season of Pentecost is also a time of new life and growth as we welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and seek out our vocation as children of God in our world.

White, is a colour that symbolizes purity and joy. Can you guess the seasons of the church year for which white is used? - Christmas and Easter. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus into our world, and Easter celebrates the victory of his resurrection to all who have been given the eyes of faith and the courage to hope.

But finally, we have another colour, and it is used primarily on one Sunday of the year, today, Pentecost Sunday. It is the colour Red. Why Red? What does Red symbolize? Red is the colour of passion, and passion comes in many forms. What form of passion is reflected when we say that someone is seeing red? Rage is the passion we are thinking of. And what about when someone turns red? This reflects embarrassment or shame. On the other hand, calling someone red-blooded would refer to how passionate they are. Sadly, too often, red is also associated with bloodshed, and in the church, the colour red has often been associated with persecution and martyrdom. But all of this doesn't truly capture the kind of passion that is associated with Pentecost. No. The passion that is marked by the colour red at Pentecost is the passion that we sometimes associate with fire, and specifically, the fire of the Holy Spirit.

In our reading from Acts we are told that the believers were all gathered together in one place. And we know from other verses in Acts that when they gathered, they shared together in intimate fellowship and intense, heart-felt prayer. They were asking God to renew them and empower them. They were seeking new confidence, clarity of vision and bold inspiration to bear witness as disciples of their messiah Jesus. And what happened? We are told that a mighty sound like the rush of a violent wind came and swept through the place. They were also given words of bold and inspired praise. This boldness and inspiration were so astonishing that we are told they were possessed with tongues of fire.

And so, if we followed this reading of the origins of Pentecost, we would have to conclude that the colour red has to do with fire and fire has to do with a kind of passion that breaks out into bold, confident, and inspired expressions of praise and thanksgiving. Imagine what it would be like to be filled with fresh purpose in your life, deep assurance, new vision for how much life is a gift and how divine grace is all around you like a warm fire surrounding you. Yes, indeed, praise and thanksgiving are the appropriate ways to respond. From a state of fear, uncertainty and guilt, the disciples meditated and prayed, waited, hoped, and

dreamed, and suddenly, they began to feel a deepening conviction that God was truly with them, that Jesus' Spirit had descended upon them and was filling them so that they would never be forsaken or alone. What a feeling and what a high they must have experienced!

And this high they felt was expressed in astonishing ways. For one thing, they began to express their praise and thanksgiving in different languages. Jews and pilgrims who had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world heard this bold praise and thanksgiving in their native tongues. Somehow, miraculously, unexpectedly, and spontaneously, God's Spirit broke through the barriers of language, race, and colour. For the disciple community all of this was also a fulfilment of prophecy. When God's Spirit comes upon God's people, life doesn't stay the same. It changes. It grows. It transforms. We see things we didn't see before. We sense things we didn't sense before. We are opened to possibilities we had never known before. This is the sign of the Spirit and this is what the passion of God can do in human lives, in our lives.

But, of course, we would be missing an essential element of Pentecost were we not to note, also, that the colour red is associated with the passion called love. And the book of Acts tells us a lot about the kind of love that burned its way through the first generation of believers. People shared and cared for one another in a way that those outside the community could not understand. Had they lost their minds? Had they become drunk? What would motivate someone to have such passion for giving and serving, listening, and sharing?

Let's face it, for most of us much of the time, our passion has to do with self-preservation, self-gratification, self-indulgence, and competitive ambition. But once we are exposed to the Spirit and prayerfully open our hearts and souls to the Spirit's flow, things will happen. Suddenly or more gradually, we discover new passions arising within us, new convictions, principles, values, and visions for our lives and our purpose in this world. Suddenly or more gradually we discover that serving ourselves does not satisfy as it used to and that serving God and our call to serve other life in the world brings greater satisfaction and fulfilment into our lives. Suddenly or more gradually, we begin to feel a greater stirring to be responsible and conscientious in our work, with our family and friends, in our commitments to church, world and mother earth. Suddenly or more gradually, everything we do and everything we plan has some greater purpose, and there is a greater force for good we feel compelled to serve.

Yes, indeed, all this and more, is part of the fire of Spirit that began to burn through the earliest group of Christians.

But what about us here today? Where are the signs of the Spirit's fire in our lives? Is the flame there? Has it ever been lit? Does it need to be kindled? Let us take our cue from our siblings in the faith long ago. Let us begin our prayers by asking God for a greater measure

of God's Spirit into our lives. The more we want it and the more we express our want in prayer, the more we will receive a growing conviction that it will come to us and the more we will begin to feel it working and growing inside us.

Asking, seeking, desiring, and longing for something, expands our receptivity. It focuses our lives on what truly matters to us and what we truly need in life in order to find genuine fulfilment and joy, and not the kind of fulfilment that comes and goes with the thrill of buying something new, nor the joy that comes and goes with the latest achievement or promotion. No, the joy we want and the fulfilment we need is something only God can give us and it comes invisibly in our hearts and souls like the rush of a violent wind and the heat of a raging fire.

Do you want a greater measure of the Spirit? Watch what you ask for, and especially if you ask for it sincerely and persistently. God will not disappoint you. Amen.