

28 May 2023

Acts 2:1-21  
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13  
John 7:37-39

I find myself trying to imagine the scene in the heavenly courts as that great day approached. Perhaps it was something like this ...

“It’s time. I’m pulling him back in.” There was a spark of lightening, accompanied by a gentle rumble of thunder. The angels and elders looked up, breaking off their conversations. One angel expressed the puzzlement many of them felt: “What do you mean, Lord? Time for what? And who’s being pulled in?”

The Almighty clarified: “It’s time for Jesus to return to us. His time on earth has come to an end.”

An excited murmuring arose among them; the wings of all the angelic beings fluttered, setting up a sympathetic movement in the ornate hangings behind the throne.

One of the elders spoke up, a little hesitantly. “But, Majesty, so soon? It is only a few weeks since he was restored to the disciples after the dreadful events of Golgotha. How will the disciples cope? They’ll be lost without him, won’t they?”

“Haven’t you been paying attention, my friend?” gently chided one of the angels. “Jesus has told them already what to expect. Before he died, when he shared that last supper with them, he told them, ‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.’”

The Almighty beamed, and the gold and jewels of the throne were suffused with the warmth of reflected light.

“But how are you going to do it, Lord?” continued the angel. “How are you going to send your Spirit upon them so that they, um, ‘get it’; so that they know that it is *the* Holy Spirit.?”

“Well, for a start, that’s where the timing thing comes in,” began God, and again a portentous rumbling filled the room. “Pentecost.”

“Ah, of course,” breathed one of the elders. “The fiftieth day after Passover; the giving of the Law on Sinai, giving the rescued people a new way of life to carry out in fulfilment of your holy purposes, Lord.”

“*And* the festival of First Fruits,” chimed in an excited seraph, stepping forward from its place of guard beside the throne. “The first sheaf of wheat from the crop, offered in thanksgiving and in prayer that the rest of the crop will be gathered in too.”

There was a great deal of nodding, and a burble of voices of assent, at the aptness of this plan.

“So how’s it going to be done, Lord?” asked Michael, the archangel. “How is the Spirit going to be recognised in this Pentecost?”

“By wind and fire!” The room positively vibrated with energy as the words came. While it was the Father who spoke the words, they were simultaneously chorused by an, at first, unseen but powerful voice. Then they saw him: a shimmering, rather like a heat haze rising above the desert sand; a diffuse glow, as of embers that need just a breath of air to flare into flame; a presence emanating from the Almighty Father. The Holy Spirit.

“Tell us more, Lord!” exclaimed an excited young cherub, who then immediately turned its gaze back to the Father, shamefaced. “I’m sorry, Majesty. I don’t know who to address: do I address you, or do I address your Spirit?”

It was God the Father who answered. “To address one of us is to address us all.” Then he chuckled. “Don’t be embarrassed: our divine nature is going to keep theologians occupied until the end of the age.”

He went on, and as he spoke the Spirit seemed to shimmer and glow and wave all the more. “Picture the scene. The disciples gathered together on the day of Pentecost: Jesus will have disappeared from their sight ten days earlier, and they will have been spending the time appropriately waiting in prayer and organising themselves. A rushing wind filling the whole house. Tongues of fire coming to rest on each of them as the Spirit fills them. And they, my humble disciples from Galilee, will find themselves speaking in the languages of all the people gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. There will be great astonishment and amazement among those as they hear the disciples proclaim the powerful things I have been doing through Jesus, in their own languages.”

A couple of the elders clapped their hands excitedly. “The curse of Babel reversed!” one exclaimed; and the other carried on, “And the promise to Abraham fulfilled: ‘In you, and in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed!’”

The Spirit picked up the thread of the plan: “And Peter doesn’t know it yet, but he will find himself with understanding such as to give a coherent explanation to all who are there. He may even remember the old promise given through the prophet Joel.”

There was a great deal of animated chatter as the angels and elders processed all that they had just heard. It took quite some time, and even a word of command from the Spirit, for order to emerge out of the chaos.

“Any questions?” asked the Almighty.

A hand went up: Gabriel. “Please, Lord, but in my experience these humans tend to be easily frightened. I assume the plan is that all among the faithful who desire it will receive the Spirit’s infilling. So how will that succeed if it is always going to be with dramatic signs like wind and fire, things the humans often fear?” he said glancing at

the shimmering form of the Spirit. “I mean no disrespect,” the archangel hastily added.

“I am indeed powerful,” responded the Spirit, and those present trembled a little, “but I can also be as gentle as a dove. Some will need to see my power, in order to be assured that I have equipped them to face the difficult situations that they will encounter in the ongoing skirmishes before Jesus’ victory is fully outworked. Others will need a quieter, steadier, deeper work as they face with patience the demands of life in the world.”

“I foresee instances of pride or jealousy arising among these humans,” said an experienced angel – she’d seen it all before as she ascended and descended on that old deceiver Jacob’s ladder.

“Yes, indeed, it will be so,” said the Father. There was both sadness and love in his voice. “And the same issues will arise around the gifts that the Spirit will impart to them. But in time they will learn that all people and all gifts have a place and have value – regardless of how they have experienced the Spirit – and the Spirit will help lead them into true fellowship, to be a people living in unity, reconciled to one another and bearing the message of reconciliation.”

Another hand went up. “You talk of gifts, Lord. What gifts?”

The Spirit whirled and shone brighter. “I will give gifts like words of wisdom to guide them when they don’t know what to do, words of knowledge to help them discern and understand what is going on, extra faith for when the going is tough, the ability to bring healing for the sick or release to those possessed, a view of how things might turn out to be in order to stir them onwards and to warn them against falling into danger, sighs and words with which to express their deepest needs and longings, and so on.”

The angel concerned about pride shook his head again. “I imagine that they will find these gifts out of the ordinary – perhaps even spectacular at times – so I expect we’ll see pride, envy, covetousness and the like arising around them too.”

“Again, you are sadly right,” affirmed the Father. “I have foreseen this too. I’m preparing someone who should be ready to write about these things when the time comes. He’s a long way from knowing it yet, and he’ll need a wake-up call on the Damascus road before he’s ready – but this fellow Saul (I think of him as Paul) is a scholar steeped in Scripture, a fine thinker and writer, and if he accepts my call on his life I’m confident he’s going to write about how all these gifts, while given to individuals, are nevertheless given for the common good, for the purpose shared by all my people. I imagine that he’ll frame it all in the context of my great love for them and for the world. There is faith, hope, and love, you know; but the greatest thing is love.” The Almighty smiled and glowed brighter than ever.

“It all seems terribly fragile, Lord,” said Michael, deep concern furrowing his brow. “Why does Jesus need to be brought back in? Wouldn’t it be better to leave him there with them?”

“There are two reasons,” replied the Father. “The first is that it allows my plan to continue to unfold. Having placed my Son within the human race I have somewhat limited the extent of his reach: of necessity he can only relate to one people in one time. While he can teach the disciples, there things stop. But as I bring Jesus back in to heaven with us and send my Spirit to continue his work, it multiplies: the disciples become equipped to make disciples who in turn can make disciples – and, as my plan for the day of Pentecost highlights, this can span across nations and languages and through the generations.”

The archangel nodded thoughtfully as the logic of this took root; and then continued nodding more enthusiastically, rejoicing at the outworking of God’s plan from the beginning. The others were nodding too; excited whispers being exchanged between them.

“And the second reason?” prompted Michael.

“The second reason is that Jesus’ return to us expresses the fulfilment of my plan from the beginning. I placed my Son within humankind to bring it back to me. As I

bring Jesus back, he is as the firstfruits of humankind. His risen body will see decay and death no more, and he will take his place here at my right hand to do what I planned for humankind to do from the beginning: to rule over all creation for me and to intercede for them. Jesus is the sign and the promise of the great harvest to come at the end of the age. He is the guarantee that the final victory over sin and death has indeed been won. He is the beginning of the new creation. And it is that harvest and victory and new creation towards which the Spirit-equipped disciples and all who come after them will be working. The sooner they start that great work, the better: they, and the whole world, need it!"

During this speech the Spirit had started spinning, gently and slowly at first, and then growing into a great whirlwind of awesome flame and light. The whole room shook, and then, as the Father finished speaking, angelic trumpets sounded, the seraphim and cherubim saluted, and all the elders stood and erupted into applause and shouts of praise. God's great plan among humanity becoming reality; the new age was dawning. *This* was what it was all about!

And the Father said, "It is time!"

**Sources:**

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