

“And” (Acts 2:1-13)

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Sitting in a screen porch one summer afternoon in Durham, North Carolina, a warm breeze blew ruffling papers and gently massaged my face; there was certainly no rushing violent wind or fire, though it can be pretty hot during a North Carolina summer. As I looked out, I saw several different pictures of creation—red robins flying by seemingly without a care in the world, pine trees standing tall in blessed assurance that nothing would shake their foundations, myrtle trees waving at me in the wind with their leaves—all of these created by the artistic hand of God’s grace. There was grass that needed mowing, soil that needed tilling, mulch that wanted moving, a water fountain flowing, a small pond with stones that sometimes formed a racetrack for ducks. There were different sounds of creation’s music, different species of birds and bugs and wasps and snakes. There were a variety of shades of light and shadows. Tall objects, others tiny, some wide as an ocean, others thin as a rail. What I saw on this canvas of creation was diversity. Nothing quite the same. No creation of God is quite the same, just as each finger on our hands is different from one another.

Even the stained-glass windows in many of our churches are a great cloud of multiple colors, not just one, but several that form each window. Not just yellow or red or green or blue, but different colors, together, make up a whole window, make up its beauty because their mosaic majesty is beautiful; their beauty consists of a colorful diversity which reflects the beauty of God. So whether in building architecture or the artful architecture of creation, it’s as if Pentecost has always been with us because Pentecost affirms diversity and multiplicity. In other words, the work of the Spirit at Pentecost affirms the conjunction ‘and.’

Acts tells us that Jews from every nation under heaven ask, “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” And then Peter preaches from the prophet Joel, “...I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women....” And. Not ‘or.’

The mosaic beauty of stained-glass windows and all of creation are a transparent window into the aesthetic nature of God because God is an ‘and’ God. Just as multiple colors make up these windows and multiple creatures make up creation, multiple persons make up the one triune God. God is an ‘and’ God. Father and Son and Holy Spirit. God functions with the conjunction ‘and’ from the very beginning in Genesis. When God created the heavens and the earth. There was an evening and there was a morning. Waters and sky. Plants and trees. Birds and sea creatures. Male and female. God functions with conjunctions. Winter and Spring and Summer and Fall. Jews and Gentiles. ‘And’ is everywhere, even at Pentecost.

The presence of wind and fire on the day of Pentecost represents the presence and power of God (see Exod: 3:2, 14:20, 24; 19:16-25; 1 Kings 19:11-12; Psalm 104:4), showing us that the multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural mosaic manifestation of diversity—the ‘and’—is an act of the Spirit of God because God is an ‘and’ God. Diversity is a gift of God and Pentecost reveals that God embraces difference and doesn’t erase who we are in our particularity. In fact,

by the Spirit, human variations are created. This diversity is God-breathed. From its inception on the day of Pentecost, the church was a diverse community, not by human agency, but divine power and presence through the Spirit of the risen Christ.

Diversity is the creation of God. Diversity is the beautiful excellence of God manifesting in the world. Multiplicity, not singularity, is the beauty of God because diversity is within God's own being and hopefully what we are becoming as the church of the future. Multiplicity is what helps make sense of the world God created and what gives fuller insight into who God is. Diversity isn't what is confusing or troubling—though it may be presented that way at times—but uniformity or sameness is what should raise our eyebrows because it is unlike the nature of God and antithetical to who God has always been from the beginning.

The diverse church created at Pentecost is a glimpse, not only of the beginning of the church but of its end, that is, our future with God and in God. And the church isn't the only thing diverse. If we take the Bible seriously and know anything about it, it, too, embodies diversity and multiplicity. The Bible is a book made up of multiple sources, multiple voices, multiple cultures, multiple authors, multiple genres, multiple languages, and multiple historical settings and, and, and. The Bible as the Word of God is an 'and' book, reflecting the 'and' God.

But so often, inside and outside the church, difference of any kind—ethnic, religious or political or more—is demonized, although as father of former Duke surgeon Dr. Onye Awkwari taught, “all human beings breathe free air, and no human being is bigger or better than you.” Difference and diversity are gifts of the Spirit and from God. Diversity shouldn't be divisive, doesn't have to be divisive, but this is often the case because we confuse and equate unity with uniformity in which everything and everyone is the same, acts the same, thinks the same, looks the same. But God is more beautiful than that, more beautiful than uniformity. God's beauty is revealed in the diversity of creation and multicolored mosaic stained-glass windows.

In the Spirit, there is no expectation for uniformity but there is one for unity; yet, to have unity, you have to have diversity. Diverse voices, diverse languages, diverse ethnicities, diverse genders, diverse classes. A polyphonic community where multiplicity is seen as the beauty of God on earth as it is in heaven. Some may feel as if inclusion means exclusion, though this isn't the case, and then view diversity as a problem to be solved. Some will move out of neighborhoods or change schools or even churches when ‘the different other’ starts moving in.

In 2014, the Duke University alumni magazine did a special cover story on “The Changing Face of Duke.” It focused on the growing and largest minoritized group on Duke's campus—the Asian and Asian-American student population with all of their various ethnic identities. Some come from families who lived in the United States for years; others are international students. As the article says, this blooming presence on campus was creating a “ripple effect of institutional change along social, cultural, and academic lines.” But not everyone was celebrating this growing ethnic diversity when this magazine issue was published. Some alumni responded to this cover story by saying, “Duke's not for me anymore.” Why can't it be for you *and* me? Aren't we more alike than different?

A 16-year-old girl at the 1997 World Summit of Children wrote and spoke these words:
 “He prayed – it wasn't my religion
 He ate – it wasn't my food.
 He spoke – it wasn't my language.
 He dressed – it wasn't what I wore.
 He took my hand – it wasn't the color of mine.
 But when he laughed – it was how I laughed.

And when he cried – it was how I cried.”

Why can't it be for you *and* me?

God is an 'and' God. Rather than trying to make people like us, why don't we strive to help others become more like who God has created them to be, since God's beauty is reflected through diversity and multiplicity? Writer Audre Lorde once asked in a journal entry, “How can we use each other's differences in our common battles for a livable future?” Or, as construction worker Rodney King said after surviving an act of police brutality in Los Angeles, which eventually led to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, “Why can't we all just get along?” You *and* me.

Why can't we all embrace the 'and' of God? I know some diva sopranos think they are the choir, but the choir, the church, is not a soloist but consists of sopranos and altos and tenors and basses. And, not 'or.' God's 'and' Pentecostal train left the station centuries ago and it has set the world on fire ever since! Will you get on board God's train? Diversity is God's train. Pentecost reframes diversity theologically and shows us who is central to diversity—God is. All of the diverse languages at Pentecost spoke of God's deeds of power. They didn't speak of themselves but of God. This is how you test diversity through a Christian lens—ask, “Who is central?” Through the eyes of the Spirit of Christ, God is the center of diversity and the source of our unity in whom we have eternal communion. Through the lens of Pentecost, diversity doesn't make human beings and our identities central, no matter how beautiful and cherished we are; it makes God central, calling us to relinquish the center and control and enthrone God rather than ourselves, because it is in God's triune life that we are able to dance together in our beautiful diversity. And this dance is led by Jesus Christ who is the Lord of the dance.

Some want to stop this dance of diversity because it's breaking out all over in churches, in classrooms, in courtrooms, in boardrooms, and some people are scared of the difference birthed in an Upper Room, but the wind of the Spirit will not be stopped because it's exploding like dynamite! That's what the fire, the power, the *dunamis*, of God is doing. Exploding, expanding, stretching boundaries, crossing borders, spreading all over the world with a surplus of grace empowered by the Spirit. A spiritual excess that spills over into every culture and every tribe and every nation and every language and every race and every ethnicity and every gender. Exploding like a baptismal bomb of blessing over the young and old, men and women. Everyone. All flesh. The 'and' of God means all are included because the Spirit never runs out of joy or power, never erects walls of exclusion but pours, washes, falls on all flesh. To the ends of the earth (1:8). 'And' means all. Everyone. Basking in the fiery glow of the Spirit of God's all-inclusive love.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs. Germans and Italians. Swiss and English. French and Spanish. Chinese and Greeks. Russians and Ukrainians. Ethiopians and Japanese. Kenyans and Israelis and Palestinians and Iranians. And. And. And.

Fill us, O Spirit of Christ, with an 'and' Spirit. At Pentecost, we see “every nation under heaven” symbolically, which points to what the church is called to be, historically, theologically, and practically. In its beginnings, we see the seeds of the future of God for us. We get a glimpse, have a foretaste, of the first fruits of God's diverse kingdom; we see in the church's beginning at Pentecost, our ending together. We see 'and.' The future of God is 'and,' so through diversity in the present we live into the future God has for us where there is every tribe and nation and language and culture, praising God in polyphonic plurality. This is our future as the people of

God, our mosaic mission to function with conjunctions. What a powerful witness it would be in our splintered world, if we truly live out God's 'and.'

The winds of Pentecost are still blowing, and they can't be controlled. And as the Spirit blows, we're moving toward God's diverse future every day because as Christians, we are always becoming. We have not yet arrived at the full beautiful vision of God's future in the present. But we are moving, we are praying, and we are working toward it.

Baptists and Anglicans, Lutherans and Coptic and Greek and Russian Orthodox, Methodists and Catholics and Mennonites, Pentecostals and Presbyterians. Holy rollers and the frozen chosen. From east and west, north and south, meeting for fellowship at the wedding supper of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, drinking wine and eating bread. From every nation and every language and every gender and every race and every class and every ethnicity and every political persuasion and every family history and every educational background. All flesh, young and old. Every musical style, every preaching style, every worship style, every theological tradition, every kind of Christian because the church is, to use Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. words, Christ's "world house"! And it is so beautiful. Pentecost. And.

It's time to practice Pentecost and join in with our 'and' God in Jesus Christ who is both divine and human. It's prayer time as it was at Pentecost, but it's also practice time. We will be and do 'and' with God's help, going into the future. We will see, with God's help, greater glimpses of the full beauty of God's future in the present. Let it be so, now and forever. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.