

Podcast Transcript

6.5.22 Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9 • Psalm 104:24-34, 35b • Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21 • John 14:8-17, (25-27)

<<Music: “Building Up a New World,” 1st verse, fade out under opening sentence.>>
<<“We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.”>>

[Intro and Transition:]

[Intro:]

- Hi everyone. Welcome back to The Word Is Resistance, the podcast where we're exploring what Christian sacred texts have to teach us about living, surviving, even thriving in the context of empire, tyranny, violence, and repression - the context in which we are living today. Through Christian scripture and our various traditions, what guidance can we find and imagination can we practice, as white folks, about our role in resistance, in showing up, in practices of repentance and liberation?
- *My name is Rev. M Jade Barclay. Or just M. My pronouns are they/them and I am the director of an organization called enfleshed where we create and facilitate spiritual nourishment for collective liberation. I am southern grown but currently residing in the Midwest, in the place currently known as Iowa City, IA but first home to the Ioway, Otoe, Omaha, Pawnee, Sioux, Sauk, and Meskwaki peoples.*
- This podcast is a project of SURJ Faith and is particularly designed for white Christians—white Christians talking to other white Christians about race and white supremacy. We believe white Christians have a responsibility to commit ourselves to resisting white supremacy, to speaking up and showing up and disrupting white supremacy where we find it, especially through the Christian tradition. Any of us white folks who have grown up with a relationship to Christianity - whether conservative, liberal, evangelical, or progressive - have inherited Christian specific facets of white supremacy that we have the power and responsibility to unlearn and imagine anew, including our conception of the divine.

- We do this work remembering we are building up a new world. This live recording of Dr. Vincent Harding's song for the freedom movement is of a multi-racial "movement choir practice" in Denver, CO in December 2014, led by Minister Daryl J. Walker. We are deeply grateful to the Freeney-Harding family for letting us use the song for this podcast.

[Transition:]

- As we move into our reflection today, I'm going to invite us into some grounding through a few words from our liturgy library at enfleshed. This is written by Rev. Anna Blaedel. Join me now, in taking a breath, taking a moment, and receiving these words:

none of this is new, even as so much is and feels unprecedented.

all of this has been building for a long time.

repairing/restoring/healing is long, slow labor.

some losses can never be made right.

here we are.

may we:

breathe. create. harbor.

share nourishment.

savor the joy that finds us.

cultivate beauty where and how we can.

disrupt the shit that's killing us, collectively and unequally.

tend life with fierce and tender care.

rev. anna blaedel

<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>

<<"Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>

[Main Content:]

Today's text is the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-21. Hear now the reading, to which I've made slight adaptations.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among

them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And 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. All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "People of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your children shall prophesy, and your young people shall imagine, and your elders shall dream dreams. Even upon the enslaved of all genders, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of God's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of God shall be saved.'

As I read through the Pentecost text, I feel how much it just overflows with examples of Mutual Interest. Mutual Interest is the theme we have been bringing to the surface of our reflections this season. This is the idea that we who are white also have a stake in addressing white supremacy. That it does not serve our ultimate well-being and doesn't wish for us to flourish even as it does reward us when we are willing to live by its rules and maintain its power and control on its behalf. Mutual interest is the idea that anti-racism isn't something we practice out of guilt or altruism - neither of which are sustainable nor do they lead us to an effective strategy for substantive transformation. We put in our own fight because whether cultures of whiteness wish to keep us economically oppressed, turn cis people against us, control our bodily agency, or teach us to repress our feelings, our pleasure, our grief, our anger - we all are being forced into ways of being that harm us and or our loved ones. The more we learn how, the more we can also begin to recognize everything we have to gain by casting our loyalty with others also seeking alternative ways of being.

Mutual interest acknowledges the ways that white supremacy - and all its inseperable webbed relations - sexism, ableism, transphobia, the colonization of the land, all the

intersecting forms of empire - is an 'all of us' problem. With we who are white occupying a particular role shaped by our access to and intimacy with the dominance white supremacy affords us.

When we begin to live from a place of mutual interest in combatting white supremacy, collaborating across identity differences for a shared goal, we also deepen our relational capacity with our BIPOC siblings in these movements. We learn to live and love and act from a place of solidarity, of genuine in it together, of shared grief and shared joy, of agency and humble confidence rather than the guilt, shame, and insecurity that can get in the way of relational dynamics - and make us act weird, unhelpful, or do harm. Instead, we build authentic connections and nurture love and joy in community. By tending to our own inner lives, practicing healing and unlearning the white supremacy culture and religious beliefs that have shaped everything from our understanding of our own bodies, to what love looks like, to how we should manage conflict, to what we mean when we say the word god - the more we tend to those internally, the more we are able to be a freer version of ourselves, to show up how we wish to in community and collective spaces. Living, loving, laboring toward something that better serves all of us.

I definitely recommend listening to the whole series on Mutual Interest. This concept is critical. And for some of us, it can be counterintuitive to the very anti-racist frameworks we have been introduced to. It's important to linger in this idea - it becomes a significant foundation for the why, the how, the who, and the what we do as white people striving to be in fruitful and lasting solidarity under forces of white supremacy and empire.

So what does all of this have to do with Pentecost? Everything!

This moment in our text is oooooooozing with exactly what we need right now.

Pentecost, of course, was the Jewish festival of Shavuot - or the festival of weeks. This traditionally agricultural holiday became a celebration of when Torah was revealed on Mt Sinai. A remembrance of that time when a newly freed, formerly enslaved community established a set of agreements about how they would live together, who they would be, what their ethics were, and how they understood and related to the God behind their freedom.

This is the celebration unfolding among these Jewish Christ followers in Acts. They have recently felt the grief of Jesus state execution. They have encountered the power of God that nurtures aliveness in the unbearable aftermath of a death that never should have been. They would have understood the resurrection as an indication that this was

a new era. God's deliverance of the Jewish people would come into full fruition and even the Gentiles would be invited into their liberation. Under the God of the ancient Jews, all life would be free from empire's destruction. This is a cause of mutual interest.

The people gather in this faith - the faith of the God who handed down Torah, who chose them to be Their people, who promised that one day, liberation would come in full. And their liberation will serve the world. Gentiles would benefit too. The land will benefit. Even those who occupy positions of power under the Roman empire - they too, would benefit spiritually, even as they fight it to protect their material treasures.

And as the people gather together in this shared faith, the Spirit moves. Like a violent wind, says the scripture. I imagine the chaos of people bustling, dancing, singing, feasting. This is no orderly event with people sitting calmly in pews. This is more like a holy storm. Stories of deliverance are remembered. Re-commitments are made. Hopes for the future of freedom that God promised are rekindled. The Spirit - the ongoing presence of God among the people of God - is wild and alive. This is not a people who will be obedient to the empire's destructive ways - this is a people filled with an ungovernable spirit.

In this collective space, miracles start to unfold. In this space. In this moment. Differences are no longer barriers to understanding one another. And - neither are differences erased. They begin to understand through different languages and experiences their shared and common desires. Children and elders, people of every gender, those who speak different languages and bear different cultures - each bring something specific to this movement, and God's spirit will be poured out among all of them.

Why? For what?

Not for any institutional church, as Pentecost is often framed. The Spirit of Pentecost has no such loyalties or interests. The power of God to which they so enthusiastically pointed was the power of deliverance out from under empire, the power of revelation of a law that frees, and the promised flourishing of God's creation.

This was a movement bursting with a sense of possibility. United in their differences - not for the sake of unity in any abstract sense - but for the sake of a common hope of flourishing. Individual and collectively.

This is what mutual interest looks like in practice. To come together in our differences - not erasing them but recognizing the way our particularities can shape the role we play

in the movement. A movement of liberation from the ways of empire. A movement from which every one of us can benefit. A movement in which we are all needed. The young will prophesy. The elders will dream. Some will be on the front lines. Some will teach. Some will be the tender caregivers or the artists who inspire. From our different genders and races and disabilities and sexual orientations - we bear experiences, traditions, wisdoms, and proximities to power that all shape our role, shape our interest, shape what it looks like to be fruitful. This requires us to be honest about the histories that have shaped the need for liberation. Honest about the differences of impact and experiences with empire. Honest about how much must change within and between us.

By claiming our mutual interest, we do not pretend away how significantly different our relationship to white supremacy or empire at large is from our BIPOC siblings. As in our scriptures, all our welcome into the movement of Christ-followers, but it is the gentiles who are welcomed into the movement of the God of ancient Israel. The gentiles have much to gain from the liberation of the Jewish people. The gentiles who join their movement come with their own suffering under the Roman empire. It is different than that of the ancient Jews. But they find hope together in shared values and visions of freedom and flourishing. Similarly, we who are white have much to gain from the liberation of Black and Indigenous and all communities colonized, even as we remain truthful about how different our experiences. We are drawn in by the deep sense that something more satisfying, more safe, more alive, more kind, more creative than the era of this empire is possible. This is the promise of God.

Empires rise and fall. Eras end and begin. And that means this one we find ourselves in too. This era is not forever. This era where guns are prized over people, where young white men are taught to hate and to kill and to protect their white male power at all costs. Where the land suffers and billionaires hoard wealth and resources and trans children are targeted by the state.

There will be an end to this era. But it will not happen accidentally or passively. So where will we gather? With whom and for what?

The Wild and Unruly Spirit is always ready to shake the foundations of the earth. To usher us in the direction of liberation. To enflesh the power of God in us for the sake of collective flourishing.

May we seek out the spaces where such a Spirit is actually welcome. Maybe that is your local church - blessed are the churches that are rooted in radical commitments to love and justice and solidarity. Maybe that is your local surj chapter. Or your neighborhood block. Or the community of activists in your city, organizing around economic justice, or harm reduction, or mutual

aid, or defunding the police. Maybe it's a local abortion clinic. Maybe it's just you and a few friends, starting something together. Supporting each other in living differently. Practicing courage and accountability and healing for your own sake and the sake of the collective.

Because the children indeed are prophesying. Children in Uvalde. In Palestine. Children afraid of guns and climate change and transphobic legislators.

Elders are dreaming dreams. Of safety. Of lasting change. Of a world where those yet to come will know deeper joy and rest and peace.

In the last days - when this era finally comes to an end and a new one is birthed - everyone, the scripture says, will be restored.

We celebrate Pentecost annually but it is a daily, ordinary possibility. Where two or three gather in mutual interest in collective liberation, the Spirit of God's delivering power will be poured on them, on you, on us, for the turning of the world, the changing of this era, the birth of something new. May it be so.

*<<Music interlude, verse 2 of "Building Up a New World.">>
<<Courage, sisters, brothers, people: don't get weary, though the way be long.">>*

[Call to Action and outro:]

[Call to Action:]

- In this week's call to action, consider signing up for the Abolition Action Hour hosted by SURJ. This is a one hour gathering on June 16th where you can join with others in making calls, signing petitions, sending emails, and taking online action to close jails, defund police, invest in communities, protect Indigenous rights to land and water, and more! You'll receive training and support throughout the session. There will be a link in the transcript and you can find the event details on the surj.org website.

I'd also like to invite you to consider making a donation to SURJ; we split every donation with a movement partner doing amazing work, like that of Soulforce who works to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQI people by decloaking the ideologies of Christian Supremacy and healing our communities' spirits from weaponized religion.

You can donate online at <https://bit.ly/SURJSF> , or find our podcast page at surj.org. We'll share the link on social media too. Thanks for helping support this

podcast and organizing white people to show up for racial justice and the new world we're building together.

[Outro:]

Thanks as always for joining us. We'd love to hear from y'all, and especially folks of color and non-Christian folks, by commenting on our Soundcloud or Twitter or Facebook pages, or filling out the survey on our podcast page at surj.org. Give us a "like" or rate us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you check out our podcast.

You can find out more about SURJ at surj.org, where you can sign up for SURJ-Faith updates and find transcripts for every episode, which include references, resources, and action links. Next week we'll have a resistance Word from Dr. Sharon Fennema. And finally, so much gratitude for the work of our sound editor for this episode, Claire Hitchins. As always, we appreciate you so much, Claire. Thank you!

[Words of blessing/encouragement:]

- Dear Ones, though it can be so very hard to feel in these heavy days, I do believe the wild Spirit of God is yet alive in the world. May you catch glimpses that comfort you, challenge you, and inspire you to deepen your own commitments to solidarity, love that liberates, and the turning of the world for the benefit of us all.
- I'm M Barclay and thank you for hanging with me today in these labors of love. Be well.

<<Verse 3 of "Building Up A New World, Verse 1 repeated.>>

<<"Rise, Shine, Give God glory, Children of the Light"

We are building up a new world, builders must be strong.>>

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RESOURCES:

- [Register for the Abolition Action Hour](#)
- [Donation link: https://bit.ly/SURJSF](https://bit.ly/SURJSF)

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REFERENCES:

<https://enfleshed.com/liturgy-library/>

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