

I know that this is a Sunday to recognize graduations and all, but this is also Pentecost Sunday, and for the sake of the Church it must be our focus today. In fact, I intend to sneak in next Sunday as well, because next Sunday is technically TRINITY Sunday. So my intention here is to do both today, and we will deal with Remembering next Sunday on Memorial Day weekend. OK?

I was reading something the other day which turned out to be one of the greatest theological insights I have ever had gained. On this day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the unleashing of what we call the Holy Spirit of God, we need to understand something that has probably been lost, especially in the last 200 years in our own religious culture. Let's just check a few assumptions here quickly. Point number 1: We are a culturally Protestant group of people. So, when we want to talk about religious authority, we say what? "What does the BIBLE say?" We immediately turn to the Bible. We have been doing this now for 500 years, thanks to Martin Luther and the Gutenberg printing press! Before this German man Gutenberg, books were hard to make. But he changed everything. OK.

Here is a quick question: Is the Bible locked? Is the Bible locked so that nothing new can be added? We act that way. We look back in time, always back in time. What did they say long ago, in a different world? Whatever they said back then, we are locked into that, forever. Or are we?

Point Number One says that we are mainly Protestants, and that we are locked into the Bible which stopped being written

1900 years ago. Here is point number 2: This is Pentecost, and next Sunday is Trinity Sunday. Today and next Sunday the Church in the world is supposed to focus on something. What is that? Well, we call it the Holy Spirit. But I don't know if we really believe in this part of God. The Church has always had difficulty with the Trinity concept. Who wouldn't? 3 does not equal 1. Our graduates know that! I am here today to suggest that we don't have a Trinity problem, but that we might have a time problem, especially as Protestants.

Most churches don't know what to do with Pentecost, so we wear red and dance around a little. Some churches emphasize speaking in tongues, something that I have not done. Some talk a lot about the Holy Spirit. But we talk about the Holy Spirit and look back in time to the original Day of Pentecost, and we lock it down. Something happened, almost 2,000 years ago. But it is over and locked down. Is it? We Christians might have a real problem here. Let me explain.

We Christians historically have made it sound like God did something spectacular long ago in coming in Jesus to the world. We sing it in our hymns: "Christ hath opened paradise, Alleluia!" In so many ways we make it sound like the ball game is over. Nothing to do now but to wait to die and cash in! All of God's work is over. All of God's words to us are over. They are locked in a book. Let me share a profound quote that I read the other day at Fresh Start! "History is no longer open to God's presence." Why not? Because we have been taught that everything was completed with the Resurrection of Jesus. We

are just living in the afterglow of that. But is that what we were supposed to believe and think?

As we think about the Holy Spirit and the total Trinity next Sunday, I think we need to realize that we don't have a Trinity problem, we have a TIME problem. We look at God the Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth. That was done long ago. We look at Jesus, the Incarnation of the Living God, who dwelt among us, and died for our brokenness. That was also done long ago. It is fine to believe that **these things** were completed then. But Jesus told his friends that God would send another Presence, in a sense another very real Presence of God who would continue to be with the people, and to continue to SPEAK to the people! Now we get to the heart of today's message for God's people.

Our screen shows something that we modern computer and smartphone users know quite well. We have a symbol that means we are receiving a crucial signal. What happens when those little lines go away? We have nothing. And that is bad. So here is my big insight that I believe we must share: Either we aren't looking for God's current signal, or we think that there is not one, because all that really mattered happened long ago on Easter. We look at our Bible, which is locked. We even look at Pentecost, which we tend to see as a one-time deal, and it is locked down as well. There will be no more messages from God. Church leaders have acted like they are not needed. The ball game is over! Nothing that has happened in the last 2,000 years really matters. We are just waiting for death, and then life after death. And God has had nothing to say. Well, if we take a

closer look, we might see that God has probably had a lot to say, and maybe since we were not listening for any signal, maybe God sent it to someone else!

I have many heroes and heroines. They are usually scholars and teachers and leaders. I read their words and I learn. I have been reading about the life of one of my heroes who just died in October in Montreal, Fr. Gregory Baum, born in Germany in 1923, came to Canada as a teenager. His parents were Jewish, he was raised Lutheran, and he became a Roman Catholic brother and scholar. And he had a profound impact during his life. I have been reading his own story that he wrote about his life from a year before his death. He learned in his life that the Signal of God has always been running, even if we have not been listening. Let me share just a bit of his wisdom with us here.

Gregory Baum was a young scholar in 1960, and was chosen to be a key part of what was called Vatican 2, as the Roman Catholic Church literally reinvented itself. A lot of people did not want it to do that! They were mad. They also seemed to believe that there was no ongoing signal from God. There was nothing new for the Church to believe about itself. Regarding Vatican 2, which went from 1962-1965, Baum wrote

“...when the inherited form of Catholicism was no longer able to respond to the challenges of modern society, thoughtful Catholics became restless, searched for new answers, reread the Scriptures, studied contemporary thought, and had new religious

experiences.” Well, what changes did the Catholics make because of this belief that there were new things God had to say? Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and others in the world were still beloved people of God. Even people without a named faith group were loved by God. And God was already present with them. How? Why? Because of a quote, long forgotten from the early Church: **“Where there is love and charity, there is God.”** Maybe God can still be with people of no official organized religion. Is there love and charity? Well, where does that come from? God. Let me share another great Baum quote, this time speaking about WW 2 and the neglect of Jewish people by Christians. He wrote *“I realized that the persons who wrestled against antisemitism in the 18th and 19th centuries were, for the most part, secular people committed to human rights and social equality. The courageous Germans who resisted the nazi regime were for the greater part non-believers...in fact, the record of the two German churches in hitler’s Germany is not impressive...After the war, social scientists studied the Germans and Poles who risked their lives by hiding Jews, saving them from extermination: some of these brave persons were motivated by Christian values, some by secular values. The Holy Spirit blows where it wills.”*

Maybe the Church in much of the world is in such decline in these times because it is fixated upon the distant past. We are locked into a locked Bible. That locked Bible tells us who is good and who is an outsider and a sinner, from the perspective

of long ago. Maybe God has had many new things to say in the last 500 years, and in the last 50 years. But maybe we assumed there was nothing to say. And that is why I have watched some people who claim no part of the Church acting like the best Christians who could possibly be!

I am tickled to no end that there is such a thing as **Kairos**, the prison ministry that involves some of our people. That word is so special. **Kairos** is an ancient word for **TIME**, but a word that means the special holy time when God is broadcasting and people are listening and acting. These days maybe God is broadcasting that all people should be loved as family, that we should care about our world and quit treating it like a dump! Maybe God is broadcasting that we should care about people in Gaza being shot by Israeli snipers. Maybe God has been speaking to those younger people who feel no attraction to organized religion, even though they are filled with love and charity and concern for others, and they are horrified when it looks like the Church is not!

Let's not just be locked into the distant past, without concern for today. Let's not act like everything is fine in the world because of Jesus being raised 2,000 years ago. Everything is not fine! The ball game is not over. We need to realize that we need to turn our ears and hearts back on so that we can listen for the messages of God, coming from the heart of God to us in our situations. What time does the Trinity cover? Maybe we should see that our Trinity belief teaches that God the Creator began it all, and brought life. Maybe we should believe that in

the middle of time, Jesus came to redeem our human brokenness. But that was long ago, in the middle of time. But what about now? Jesus told us there would be the ongoing presence of God, to take us through the present, all the way to God's future. Can we understand this today? And can we realize that we are not to live in a locked Bible that is fine as it is, but that it cannot speak to every new situation that we face? Let's switch ourselves ON to receive the Holy signal that has been broadcasting now for 2,000 years. May God forgive us if we have not been listening. But we can change that today, and in all days to come. Come Holy Spirit. We are ready to listen. AMEN.