

We don't usually think about all the people crowded around the Apostles on that first Pentecost in Jerusalem. Today, however, I'd like us to concentrate on the crowds in old Jerusalem, people known only by the lands they've traveled from—first-century people called “*Parthians, Medes, and Elamites.*” What are they like, these “*residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts); Cretans and Arabs?*”

To us, they're faceless and since most of their nations' names are hard to pronounce it's easier to leave them nameless. Not many of the names of their homelands mean anything to us. Yet the New Testament history book titled the *Acts of the Apostles* records in chapter 2 this mob scene with all these groups churning in confusion. If we're sincerely interested in the event of Pentecost or for that matter if we're unimpressed by such phenomena, let's admit that the foreigners standing around aren't exactly our first concern. We're hardly interested in them at all. We know that the crowds aren't the center of the story. Why turn the camera on them? Let them mill around and mutter. As we listen to the scripture, it's natural to push aside the mob in order to view the event in the middle of the screen and not worry about the spectators on the sidelines. No matter what such a conglomeration of foreigners was considered to be then, we can conveniently disregard them now.

As we do that, we realize with what ease we disregard other people in our modern world today. We all learn how to do it. You hand your money to the clerk at the gas station who's talking on the phone to her girlfriend, and she makes change and hands it back without ever looking at you. That's how much you mean. We're accustomed to it in other ways. We get mail that says, *Urgent, For Addressee Only. Do Not Discard.* Oh sure. But we know that's only a pretense of personal concern. We're used to being consumers or viewed as commodities in the market ourselves. If anything, we're market statistics.

Our phones ring so we can hear a prerecorded message pretending to care a great deal about our credit card interest rate or identity theft and offering us the privilege of purchasing the newest product. But even though we don't like these *depersonalized/personal* messages, we do it to others. How many of us know the names of the people who bag our groceries? Do we remember the color of their eyes or the color of their hair? It saves us time and energy when we don't have to relate personally. It also means that we get what we want from this person and move on. Basically, we use them. We do it because more concern for ourselves tends to lessen our concern for others. We buy. They give. And accept our money in return.

Most people don't like being a cog in a machine, even if they're paid for it. We might say such a person is well-used but not well-known. But maybe we could do something about that by showing a little more concern for people who are usually nameless or whom we identify by their function. For instance, a clerk at the checkout, or another person we identify mainly by their country of origin. For us that might be a Nicaraguan, Ethiopian, or Taiwanese person. We can start dealing personally with people we meet by thinking seriously about a person in the crowd at that first Pentecost. By zooming in on one of the faces in that crowd we can understand the significance of a “Personal Pentecost.”

According to research by the business advisory firm, *Deloitte*, 36% of consumers say they are interested in personalized products or services. Those under 40 years old are more interested, with almost half of 25-

30 year olds attracted to personalized goods and services. Ben Perkins, Head of Consumer Business Research at *Deloitte* commented: “Businesses have not only developed the capabilities to measure specifically what each individual consumer wants, they are now in a position to link their processes and resources to provide it. Beyond the mass customization of products, personalization is already playing an important role across the market with online product recommendations (Although when those ads for something I was shopping for pop up in my email I feel like I’m being spied on).”

*<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/one-in-three-consumers-wants-personalised-products.html>

To make Pentecost more personal, let’s picture a person (not a product) at the first Pentecost in our imagination. Maybe this person is thinking about promises they’ve made but haven’t kept; or lies they’ve told because they need to feel more self-important. Maybe at this moment they’re admitting to themselves that their faith is almost nonexistent and they can’t even remember why they even showed up for Pentecost in Jerusalem. Look in the crowd at a faces that resembles yours. You probably know a little about what’s behind that face—the physical or emotional pain, fights in the family, anxiety about what will happen tomorrow, trouble at work, doubts about oneself or about God.

Maybe they’re lonely, standing there in the huge crowd, or they long for something more but don’t know what it is. They could be burdened with remorse or consumed with anger. Look closely at the person—their face, height, hair, wrinkles. Don’t lose track of them in the huge crowd.

What do we all need when we’re in the middle of a huge crowd? What does that person you’re focusing on in first-century Jerusalem need—the person who’s a lot like you? Do people in general, you and your distant friend, need buckets of money, baskets of jewels, wealth untold? Do you really need much more than a sense that you’re a unique person who’s capable and lovable and cared for by others? You don’t have to be the best at anything. You don’t have to be the first person chosen or the one elected by the largest number of votes—as long as you’re noticed, cared for and loved.

My humble prayer is that our Confirmation students will remember this day as a day they were noticed, cared for and loved. I implore you to pray for each of them individually. And if you haven’t had a chance to read their personal Statements of Faith I encourage you to check them out downstairs across from the coffee counter. They are what I call the newest resident theologians of Ken Mawr Church. We should all hear what they are saying to the church today.

Sometimes people are driven by a need for power or wealth in order to make up for what’s missing inside of themselves. Not all, of course. But I am convinced that the happiest people in the world are those who serve others, the person who spends a few minutes with a lonely kid next door, or spends an afternoon giving people a ride to the doctors’ office, or someone who donates a million dollars to a Christian hospital. It doesn’t have to be a huge gift, only a way of giving something to someone else.

What changes people so they find personal fulfillment in serving others? What energizes and drives people as they look away from their own needs to the needs of others? What might free our own soul to bless others? Isn’t it simply the assurance or reassurance that God is with us in the world and that God loves us too much to leave us alone? Yes.

That’s what occurs on that first Christian Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The Holy Spirit comes on people gathered in the city and Peter proclaims that this unseen presence of God is

for *everyone*. Peter then explains it, in case someone in the crowd finds it hard to believe that God wants to personally dwell within them, or that God's Holy Spirit is coming on people of *all nationalities and ages and languages*.

Maybe one of these people in Jerusalem thinks they're no longer valuable to anyone, that all their ability to produce has been used up. But wait. God wants to live in them. Maybe a young person in Jerusalem has barely gotten started in life, and yet doubts they'll ever be loveable or capable or attractive. God wants to dwell inside of them, too.

In the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, no matter what their thoughts or needs is a person loved by God. God has *personally* come to them through Jesus Christ, and now God has *come back* to them through the indwelling Holy Spirit and will never leave them again.

If you've ever wondered what happened to those large crowds in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, they became the Church, individuals selected and loved by God, each one receiving the gift of God's Holy Spirit. They are the people who wrote the New Testament and who began to tell the whole world the good news that God comes to every one of us, even "*Parthians, Medes, and Elamites.*"

That's the message of Pentecost that we hear today. As we gaze at the faces of people in Jerusalem and know what happened to them, let's also give thanks and rejoice that the church is still here 2,000 years later.

And the church's work will not end until we all see Jesus Christ face-to-face.

That's because Pentecost was and is *personal*. Amen.