**Pentecost Vigil Readings Retold for Children**

**By Amy Rogers Hays**

*Tonight, let’s imagine that we are waiting with the followers of Jesus the night before the feast of Pentecost. It is nine days after Jesus ascended into heaven, and he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. But what are they waiting for? I wonder if they are puzzled, or maybe excited, or maybe afraid?  Jesus told them they would go and make disciples of all nations. But when will they get to go and how will they tell people about Jesus?*

*When I imagine the scene, I imagine that the disciples are telling stories as they wait and pray. I imagine that I’m Mary the Mother of John Mark, and that it’s my house at which everyone is gathered.*

*….*

Tonight, the streets are crowded. In my arms are two large loaves of borrowed bread and a full wine skin, all of which I have nearly dropped as I weave through the people. I am trying to get back to the disciples. Jesus told us to wait in Jerusalem. We are waiting together, praying and singing, sleeping and eating, waiting and hoping.

Tomorrow the festival of Pentecost is beginning, and people have come to Jerusalem from every corner of the world and somehow squeezed into my path. I walk around people from Arabia, from Rome, and Mesopotamia. In their arms are grains of wheat, the first fruits of the harvest that they will bring to the Temple tomorrow.  The noise as I climb the stairs to the upper room is almost deafening, words from a dozen languages mix with laughter.  Before I reach the top, I can hear that the disciples have started to tell a story.

It is the story of how languages and people became confused many, many years ago at the Tower of Babel. After Noah and his family had been saved in the Ark, their descendants filled the earth, but their hearts had not changed. Over the din on the street of the many languages, I recognize Peter’s voice beginning the story: “The people had wanted to build themselves a city with a tower with its top in the heavens, saying *let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.”*

I slip into the room at the end of the story to see Peter sit back down, as James sings out a bit of a psalm in response: *The LORD looks down from heaven, and beholds all the people in the world.  From where he sits enthroned he turns his gaze on all who dwell on the earth.  He fashions all the hearts of them and understands all their works. There is no king that can be saved by a mighty army; a strong man is not delivered by his great strength.*

The other disciples nod. There are twelve of them again. Matthias has just been chosen to take Judas Iscariot’s place. There are twelve for the twelve tribes of Israel, that God had Moses lead out of Egypt with a pillar of smoke and fire. Not so they could build a tower up to God, but so that they could be led to the mountain where God’s glory would come down. Fifty days after they were rescued in the Passover and delivered through the Red Sea, the twelve tribes of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai.

I set down my bread as Andrew stands and begins to recite the story of that very first Pentecost at Mount Sinai:

“*On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”*

We know that Moses went up to God and brought us back the Law when he came down again.  Nine days ago, we saw Jesus lifted up in a cloud on the top of the Mount of Olives. When will he come down again? Could there be something as wonderful as the Law that could be coming to us? He told us to stay in Jerusalem and to “wait there for the promise of the Father.” What could it be? What are we waiting for?

James sang out more of the psalm as Andrew sat down. *“The horse is a vain hope for deliverance; for all its strength it cannot save.* *Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon those who fear him, on those who wait upon his love,* *To pluck their lives from death, and to feed them in time of famine.”*

My stomach growls on the word famine. I blush, the room now smells of bread, but I have been too busy listening to the stories to give any of it to the hungry people gathered there. More than just the twelve disciples are here, and we are all hungry. I turn and a few women have come over to help me: Salome, Martha, and some of the Marys, as they call us who are honored to share the first name of the mother of Jesus. These were some of the women first to know, nearly fifty days ago, first to run that early morning to the tomb and find it empty. They were first to proclaim the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

After the bread has been blessed and broken and begins to be shared around the room, Thomas stands and begins the story of Ezekiel being taken to the valley of dry bones and seeing a picture of God’s promise of resurrection.  Now of course we think of Jesus when we hear that ancient story. Thomas tells us that God commanded Ezekiel:

*“Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord…Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves… I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.”*

We are waiting for that day when God will put his Spirit within his people and make them live again, fully alive and following God’s way. Then James sings out the next part of the psalm: *Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.* *Indeed, our heart rejoices in him for in his holy Name we put our trust.*

And in the corner, there is my own young son John Mark who takes some of the bread and gives it to the ancient looking man sitting next to him who says little and hears everything. The old man takes a small bit of bread, giving the remaining large share to two slaves who sit on his other side, a young couple that sing and chant beautifully.  Young men. Old men. Young women. Slaves male and female. It's like the prophet Joel, I think. Then I stand and speak the words God spoke through the prophet Joel: *Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.* *Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*

Everyone has gotten bread now. Then John stands and takes a wine skin and pours from it into an empty cup, *“**On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there,”* John began, and sighs as he remembers Jesus' words: *“Jesus* *cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”*

We are like empty cups, waiting for that living water to fill us up to overflowing. We are waiting for the spirit to pour out on the young and the old, the slave and the free, the male and the female. We are waiting for the breath of God to enter us and make us live. We are waiting at the foot of the mountain for the fire and wind and thunder of God to make us His people. We are waiting for the tower of Babel to be undone.

Softly, softly, I can hear the couple in the corner sing, “*O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the LORD there is mercy*,” and then just the phrase, “Wait for the Lord” over and over again. Our prayer is a song, as the night stretches towards the dawn: “Wait for the Lord.”

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*Book of Common Prayer* Pentecost Vigil Service (p. 895): Genesis 11:1-9 / Psalm 33:12-22 / Exodus 19:1-9,16-20a; 20:18-20 / Canticle 2 or 13/ Ezekiel 37:1-14 / Psalm 130 / Joel 2:28-32 / Canticle 9 (Isaiah 12:2-6) / Romans 8:14-17,22-27 /John 7:37-39a (*New Revised Standard Version*)