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Joash's attempts to restore the Temple. The Day of Pentecost.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Kings 12. In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba, and Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

Nevertheless, the high places were not taken away. The people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places. Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the holy things that is brought into the house of the the money for which each man is assessed, the money from the assessment of persons, and the money that a man's heart prompts him to bring into the house of the Lord, let the priests take, each from his donor, and let them repair the house wherever any need of repairs is discovered.

But by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, the priests had made no repairs on the house. Therefore King Jehoash summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests, and said to them, Why are you not repairing the house? Now therefore take no more money

from your donors, but hand it over for the repair of the house. So the priests agreed that they should take no more money from the people, and that they should not repair the house.

Then Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar on the right side as one entered the house of the Lord. And the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money was brought into the house of the Lord. And whenever they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's secretary and the high priest came up, and they bagged and counted the money that was found in the house of the Lord.

Then they would give the money that was weighed out into the hands of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of the Lord, and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the Lord, and to the masons and the stone cutters, as well as to buy timber and quarried stone for making repairs on the house of the Lord, and for any outlay for the repairs of the house. But there was not made for the house of the Lord basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, or any vessels of gold or of silver from the money that was brought into the house of the Lord, for that was given to the workmen who were repairing the house of the Lord with it. And they did not ask for an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workmen, for they dealt honestly.

The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the Lord. It belonged to the priests. At that time Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and took it.

But when Hazael set his face to go against Jerusalem, Jehoash king of Judah took all the sacred gifts that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah his fathers, the kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own sacred gifts, and all the gold that was found in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent these to Hazael king of Syria. Then Hazael went away from Jerusalem. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? His servants arose and made a conspiracy and struck down Jehoash in the house of Milo on the way that goes down to Silo.

It was Jehozokah the son of Shimeath and Jehozabath the son of Shomer, his servants, who struck him down so that he died. And they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

After the imposter Athaliah was deposed and the young Jehoash was set up, the reformation of Judah could properly begin. Both Jehu and Jehoash's anointings began in inner rooms, hidden from public sight, before they both burst out in judgment upon the wicked of their respective kingdoms. Jehu partly turned back the tide of idolatry in the north, for which the Lord praised him, but he never truly reversed it.

In 2nd Kings chapter 12, following the coronation of Jehoash, he will take on a further part of the messianic task of the anointed one, restoring and reforming the worship of the temple. Jehoash reigned over Judah for 40 years. This might be regarded as a propitious length of time, the same duration as the reigns of both David and Solomon.

Jehoash is here described as a righteous king, one who serves the Lord, and his life is defined by that. The role played by Jehoiada the priest in his rearing and instruction is identified as a key cause of his long-term faithfulness. The king was supposed to be a son of the Lord, his house connected to the Lord's house, and learning under the guidance of the Lord's appointed stewards, the priests.

We see this in Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 18 to 20. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel. Jehoash had the benefit of spending all of his early childhood in the temple, under the instruction of Jehoiada.

Jehoiada continued to instruct him when he came to the throne. However, like many before him, Jehoash failed to deal with the problem of the worship of the high places. In Deuteronomy chapter 12, the Lord had commanded his people to establish a single central site of worship.

One of the primary tasks of the king was to establish the unity and centrality of the nation's worship, ensuring that there weren't many different cultic centres, each with their own attendant customs. The failure to establish the temple as the single site of worship was an enduring problem from Solomon's days onwards. Jehoash initially entrusted the priests with the repair of the house of the Lord, over 100 years old by this point.

Yet by the 23rd year of his reign, no repairs had been made. We don't know when Jehoash first instructed the priests in this matter, but it seems likely that it took him a while to recognise its failure. Perhaps as Jehoash had been raised in the temple under Jehoiada and the priests, the priests had much greater power and influence in the first half of his reign.

The priest's seeming mismanagement of the funds suggests that the temple's disrepair might not merely be a matter of crumbling masonry, but of institutional corruption too. Jehoash's failure to address the situation prior to this point suggests a king weakened by his youth and his over-dependence upon the priests perhaps, and perhaps also a king who despite his good intentions and character was lacking in competence for some of

the fundamental tasks of effective governance and administration. The nation was always healthiest when kings, priests and prophets could function in firmly counterbalancing ministries, without any one or two of the officers being under the excessive influence of one or both of the others.

Lysa-Re-Beel notes that as the northern kingdom of Israel was weakened by Syrian incursions, the temple in the south would have been a symbol of growing importance. It would have consolidated the soft power of Judah with members of the northern kingdom who worshipped the Lord, and it would also serve to validate the Davidic dynasty within the nation. Jehoash confronts the priests concerning their mismanagement and he takes the responsibility for the repairs out of their hands.

This was an important step towards a better managed administration, but the fact that it took so long was not a promising sign of Jehoash's competence to achieve it. While we can see a lot of parallels between Jehoash and Solomon in their respective anointings, their concern with the temple, the length of their reigns and other such things, as in the case of Jehoshaphat, the similarities invite contrasts that highlight how far the nation had fallen from its former golden age. Jehoiada the priest sets up a collection chest for the house, and under the joint direction of the king's secretary and the high priest, the money was counted and weighed out to the overseers of the workers, who in their turn paid the various workmen.

The overseers of the workmen were trustworthy men, demonstrated by the progress of the project, so an accounting was not demanded of them. This money was not used to make implements for the temple's service however. The implements were seemingly to come from the king's own money.

The money for the guilt and sin offerings was also exempted from the funds, as that money went directly to the priests. Hazael, the king of Syria who had been anointed by the Lord against his rebellious people of Israel and the idolatrous Omrides, harries the northern kingdom and increasingly becomes a threat to the south. Jehoash and certain of his predecessors had given costly gifts to the temple as tribute to the Lord, but now Jehoash takes things that had been given as tribute to the Lord and gives them as tribute to Hazael.

It is a very negative sign. Jehoash's reign ends in assassination, in far more tragic circumstances than 2nd Kings records. In 2nd Chronicles 24 17-26 we read of the premature conclusion of Jehoash's reign.

Now after the death of Jehoiada the princes of Judah came and paid homage to the king. Then the king listened to them, and they abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs.

Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention. Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, Why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.

But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Jehoash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada Zechariah's father had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying he said, May the Lord see and avenge.

At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Jehoash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the Lord delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers.

Thus they executed judgment on Jehoash. When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David.

But they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings. Those who conspired against him were Zabot the son of Shimeioth the Ammonite, and Jehozabath the son of Shimeioth the Moabite. Like Asa, Jehoash starts well but ends badly, striking out against a prophet of the Lord.

A question to consider, which other Davidic kings took from the treasury of the Lord to give tribute to foreign invaders? Can you think of any ways in which we might face analogous choices regarding the ones to whom we pay our tribute? Acts chapter 2 verses 1 to 21. When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

And divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them, and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each one of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and

Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belong to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, What does this mean? But others, mocking, said, They are filled with new wine.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel, And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on 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 on my male servants and female servants, in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and vapour of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The story of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 is one of the richest texts in the entirety of the scriptures.

It's filled with typological connections. In a few verses, a vast array of biblical background and a great many lines of biblical narrative converge. Typology helps us to read the scripture, it helps us to understand the significance of events, and it could be argued that Pentecost is a foremost example of this.

Paying attention to the context of the story, the way the story is told, certain key details, and all these things will help us to see the way that the story of Pentecost fits into the far larger picture of the rest of the scriptures. Fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, the spirit of Christ descends upon the disciples, preparing them for their mission. It is important to understand the story of Pentecost in its context within the wider story.

The event of Pentecost is organically connected with the event of the resurrection, and with the event of the ascension that preceded it. The spirit can descend upon the church because Christ has ascended into the heavens. We see connections then with the events that have immediately preceded, in the story of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

But we also see connections with the beginning of Luke's gospel. We've already noted the way that the book of Luke and the book of Acts have parallels. The book of Luke begins with a lot of references to the The spirit overshadows the Virgin Mary so that Christ is conceived in her womb.

In the same way, the spirit will overshadow and the power of God will come upon the

church so that they, in a way analogous to Mary, will bear Christ within their midst as a new temple of the Holy Spirit. The spirit is also important in the story of the presentation. The spirit leads Simeon into the temple where he prophesies by the spirit concerning this child that is presented there.

Much as the presentation in the temple occurred on the 40th day, so Christ ascends into the heavenly temple on the 40th day. And then a man called Simeon, Simon Peter, bears witness to the Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is also an Anna who's praying constantly in the temple.

After the ascension, the disciples are also characterized by constant prayer in the temple. Like Anna, they recall the character of Hannah at the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel. Much as Hannah was accused of being drunk by Eli the high priest, so they will be accused of being drunk by religious leaders of their own day who also lack perception.

After the narratives of Christ's infancy, there is another important story concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit and that is the story of Christ's baptism. There is a transition from the ministry of John the Baptist to the ministry of Christ and the spirit descends in the form of a dove in a theophanic manner, propelling him into his mission as the son of God and the Messiah. The beginning of Acts is another transitional story, the transition from the ascended Christ to the ministry of the church.

Once again, there is a passing of the baptism. The church is baptized by the spirit, the event foretold by John the Baptist. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

And when the church is baptized by the spirit, they go forward in the power of Christ and continue what he has started. In Christ's gift of his spirit at Pentecost, we have the ground prepared for the continuation and completion of the ministry that Christ has begun. Christ's mission and the church's mission is one unified mission.

And here we find ourselves helped by reflection upon Old Testament parallels. The story of 2 Kings chapter 2, where Elijah ascends into heaven and the spirit of Elijah descends upon Elijah, who continues the ministry of Elijah, is a typological parallel that helps us to understand how the ministry of the church continues from and completes the ministry that Christ has started. From a sense of the scriptural background of what's taking place at Pentecost, an entire New Testament ecclesiology can be formed.

We might see here themes of creation and new creation. In Genesis chapter 2, the Lord breathes into man the breath of life, and here he is breathing into a new humanity, the breath of his spirit, so that this new humanity formed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him would be a place where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all. And in this new creation we see a restoration of God's people.

In Ezekiel chapter 36 and 37, God promised to restore Israel. In chapter 37, we see the way that Israel was like a field of dead and whitened bones, representing its whole house, following God's judgment that had fallen upon it. However, as Ezekiel, according to the word of the Lord, prophesied to the dry bones, the wind of the spirit comes and the dead whitened bones become a mighty living army.

In Acts chapter 2, God is establishing his people once more. 120 disciples are gathered together under 12 apostles, an Israel that is the first fruits of a greater harvest in the future. Such themes of first fruits and harvest might also make us think back to the origins of the Feast of Pentecost in an agricultural feast at the time of the wheat harvest.

The grain harvest began with the barley harvest at the time of unleavened bread and it ended with the wheat harvest at Pentecost. The Feast of First Fruits occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and this was the basis for the numbering of the day of Pentecost. Seven full weeks were numbered off and then on the day after the Sabbath they would celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

The two tenths of an ephor of flour that were presented at the Feast of First Fruits became two leavened loaves that were waved before the Lord. The attentive reader of the book of Leviticus will notice a parallel between the numbering of the Feast of Pentecost and the numbering of the year of Jubilee. The Feast of Pentecost is a miniature jubilee.

In Luke chapter 4, Jesus' public ministry began with a sermon declaring the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of the Lord's favour, the year of Jubilee, and now the beginning of the ministry of the church occurs at a mini-jubilee and the Feast of Pentecost. The Feast of Pentecost had another important association. It was associated with the time at which God gave the law to Israel.

The day on which the law was given was widely considered to be fifty days after the time of the Passover. It was considered to have taken place on the day of Pentecost. At Mount Sinai, Israel was gathered together.

God promised to make them into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. At Mount Sinai, the leader of the nation, Moses ascended into God's presence and received the law which he brought down to the people of Israel. Fire and God's presence came down upon the mountain, but the people rebelled against the Lord and against Moses and three thousand of them were killed.

In Acts chapters 1 and 2 we see that Christ, the head of a new people, ascends into heaven where he receives the Holy Spirit from the Father. On the day of Pentecost, the day on which the law was first given to Israel, Christ gives his spirit to the church. At Pentecost, God made his people into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Fire and God's presence come down, not upon a mountain, but upon a people. Whereas the people in Exodus were not fit to come into God's presence, the Spirit comes to dwell in the body of the church at Pentecost. Whereas three thousand rebellious Israelites were killed at Sinai, three thousand rebellious people are cut to the heart by Jesus Christ at Pentecost.

Recognising the parallels and also the contrasts, we can see something of the deeper New Testament theme of the juxtaposition of the law and the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift of the law, the gift of the law that is written upon the heart. That was always the promise of the new covenant and at Pentecost this is where it begins.

It's being written upon the heart of the people so that they might go forth in the power of the Spirit of Christ, bearing that law not just as an external testimony upon tablets of stone, but upon something that is born upon their hearts and in their witness. The day of Pentecost then is a great turning point in the history of redemption. The law which had only resulted in bringing people into death was fulfilled as God gave his Spirit which established people in the new life of Christ.

As Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verses 2 to 4, the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ has made us free from the law of sin and death. At Sinai the tabernacle was established and the church is established as a new temple at Pentecost. In Exodus chapter 40 the glory cloud descended upon the completed tabernacle, establishing the tabernacle as the place of God's special dwelling.

In Acts chapter 2 the Spirit descends not now upon a building but upon a people set apart to be a living temple, a dwelling place of God by the Spirit. We should note the verbal ambivalence of the word that's used for tongues in Acts chapter 2. It refers to both speech and to flame. This explores a powerful conjunction of imagery that is found elsewhere in the Old and the New Testaments.

God's word comes down in the form of fire and his word given to the church in such a manner enables the church to speak with the fiery power of prophets. The descent of tongues of flame upon the heads of the disciples might also recall other imagery from the temple and the tabernacle. In the book of Revelation chapter 1 the church is described as a candlestick.

The candlestick in the Old Testament is connected with the priest, is also a means of giving light to dark places. The church has been lit as a priestly body to give light to the darkened world, a light that is given by the power of the Holy Spirit that burns upon and within her. We should not quench the Spirit.

As the people of God we should fan into a greater flame the Spirit that has been given to us. Perhaps we're also to think of ourselves as new altars. We might recall the twelve stones that are brought together to form the altar on Mount Carmel by Elijah and then

that altar is drenched with water and then the fire of God comes down upon that altar, upon those twelve stones and burns up the sacrifices upon them.

We are being created as living altars, our lives and our actions being presented to the Lord as a living sacrifice. Beyond such themes of Sinai, tabernacle and priesthood we might also see kingly themes here. In discussing Judas in chapter 1 we've already noted the similarities between 1 Kings chapters 1 and 2 and the book of Acts chapter 1 as the Davidic king is about to leave and is giving instructions to his successor who then has to establish the new regime.

Within that parallel the event of Pentecost is framed in a particular way. It's framed as comparable to the event in which Solomon received the Spirit of the Lord to judge the people, the Spirit of Wisdom. As the church is being established as a new ruling body like Solomon it is given the Spirit of Wisdom by which it will act in a way that is prudent and good.

Christ is establishing a new kingdom. In the book of 1 Samuel chapters 9 and 10 the prophet Samuel anoints Saul as the one who is designated to be the king and he tells Saul that there will be three confirming signs that he will receive on the way back. First of all he will meet people telling him that the donkeys of his father have been found.

Second of all he will meet people on the way who are carrying items of food, bread and wine and a goat and they will give him two loaves of bread. And then finally that he will meet prophets coming down from the holy place and the Holy Spirit will come upon him and he will prophesy and become a new man. As he goes into Jerusalem Christ gives his disciples a number of similar instructions.

First of all they will go into the village and find the donkeys. Then they will go into the city and follow a man carrying a water pitcher to the place where they will celebrate the meal in which he will give them bread and wine and they will celebrate the Passover. And finally they will wait in Jerusalem until power comes upon them from on high.

Like Saul when the Spirit comes upon them they will become new men and will prophesy. A kingdom is being entrusted to them so we should not be surprised to find these signs of the kingdom befalling them. Having seen themes of priests and kings we should not be surprised to find themes of prophets too.

We have already observed some of the parallels between the story of Christ's ascension in the church's Pentecost and the ascension of Elijah and Elisha's Pentecost in the book of 2nd Kings chapter 2. That story of prophetic succession is one that provides a paradigm for understanding what this story means. We also observed the tongues of flame that descended upon them that lit their speech to give their speech power so that they might speak with different tongues and speak with the power of the Holy Spirit. Within the Old Testament witness we have a number of examples of prophetic

installation where people are established as prophets of the Lord and empowered to speak in his name.

We might think of Ezekiel's vision of the throne chariot in Ezekiel chapter 1 or Isaiah's temple vision in Isaiah chapter 6 or Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush. Such initiatory visions prepare the prophets for their missions in a number of different ways. They give them strength and resources for their tasks.

They give them a firm awareness of their personal vocation and they loosely sketch the contours of their mission. The appearance of non-consuming tongues of flame resting upon the heads of the disciples might recall the miraculous fire of the burning bush. Fire is an element associated with the Holy Spirit and his ministers.

In being raised to participate in the divine council, prophets were elevated to share the status of the angels. The prophet operates within the element of the angels. Appearing with them in the divine council or moving rapidly and miraculously from place to place in the wind and the fire of the divine throne chariot.

God's speech is like a consuming flame and the mouth of the prophet has to be prepared and kindled to burn with the fire of God's word as we see in places like Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 14. In Isaiah chapter 6 verses 6 to 7 the mouth of the prophet is cleansed and kindled with a live coal from the altar of the Lord. The connection between the tongues of flame and the tongues of speech of Pentecost might draw upon this sort of association.

The church is being lit as a witnessing lampstand and as a burning mouthpiece of the divine word. Here we might also think of events such as Numbers chapter 11 verses 16 to 30 where the Lord took of the spirit of Moses and empowered 70 elders of the people to exercise prophetic rule alongside him. As the Lord descended in the cloud and placed the spirit of Moses upon the 70 they spontaneously began to prophesy in a remarkable but non-recurring manner.

The desire that Moses expressed at that time would that all of the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them is alluded to in the promise of Joel chapter 2 verses 28 to 29. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter claims that this prophecy is arriving at its fulfillment. In the pouring out of the spirit upon the church a new prophetic people are being formed.

As in Numbers chapter 11 the spirit of the leader of the people is distributed to others who will exercise gifted prophetic rule alongside and under him and as in Numbers chapter 11 the reception of the spirit is accompanied by remarkable prophetic speech that manifests that something miraculous has occurred. At Pentecost the spirit descends and rests upon the church in a manner comparable to the descent and resting of the spirit upon Jesus at his baptism. Perhaps the most typically referenced background for

the story of Pentecost is found in Genesis chapter 11 in the story of Babel.

At that point humanity is undivided. They all speak a single language and use a single speech. They settle in the plain of Shinar where forming and firing bricks and using asphalt for mortar they undertake a vast building project.

It's a two-fold project. They want to build a city and they want to build a tower. One has a horizontal aim gathering together humanity in a city and the other has a vertical aim connecting heaven and earth and within this mega city and the immense tower at its religious heart humanity would be preserved from being spread out throughout the earth as God had intended them to be.

God frustrated their designs as he descended from heaven and confused their language so that they could no longer understand each other. Forced to abandon their building project humanity was scattered abroad across the face of the entire earth. This story of Babel provides a background for the story of the call of Abram in the following chapter in Genesis chapter 12.

God calls Abram and promises that he will make his name great. The tower builders had sought to make their own name great but God would make Abram's name great. God would make Abram a blessing to all of the nations that had been judged at the event of Babel.

In the book of Galatians we are told that the blessing of Abram is the spirit and as we read through the story of Abraham and his descendants we might see how this connection is drawn. In the story of Jacob for instance when he reaches Bethel we have a number of echoes of the story of Babel. He gathers stones together as the Babel builders had gathered bricks.

He sees a ladder going from earth to heaven connecting the two and he names the place Bethel, the house of God, calling it the gate of heaven. One of the translations of Babel is gate of God. It might seem that there is a connection between Babel and Bethel.

The true Babel, the true tower between heaven and earth is Jacob's ladder. In John's gospel chapter 1 Jesus speaks of himself as if he were Jacob's ladder. He says to Nathanael, Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Jesus is the tower between heaven and earth. He is the one who has ascended into heaven and he has sent his spirit down, so that in his spirit his people might be raised up to where he is. There is an ascent and a descent.

What Babel sought to achieve in man's own power God has provided in Christ. Pentecost also eclipses Babel's horizontal project, its attempt to gather humanity together. Babel was the moment when humanity was divided into many nations under judgment, each

speaking their own languages.

At Pentecost many nations are brought together in a new building project, the building project of the Church. Although speaking many tongues, they are now expressing a single religious voice, as divine prophecy is given in many languages and dialects, not just in the religious tongue of Hebrew. The diversity of humanity becomes a vehicle for its religious unity and the era of the exclusivity of Hebrew has ended.

By implication Pentecost is a definitive and seminal moment in the fulfillment of the promise that all of the nations will be blessed in Abraham. Seeing so much scriptural background, we should recognize something of the significance of the event of Pentecost, what it stands for and how it provides a basis for so much of the New Testament's thinking about what the Church is and what its mission should be. A question to consider, reflecting upon some of the New Testament teaching about the character of the Church, how can you trace it back to the event and the interpretation of Pentecost?