

Title: Seeing Red

Scripture: [John 7:37-39](#)

Text: [Acts 2:1-17, 21](#)

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Today is Pentecost. You knew that already. We asked people to send in red pictures, wearing red, holding red things, playing with red pinwheels. Since the beginning of worship, you've been seeing red. Several of the other pastors came up with this idea. I wasn't in disagreement. Red just isn't the first thing that comes to mind with the word

Pentecost.

Those of you who read the Enews...and not all of you are reading those Enews or reading them very carefully...knew about this idea that the other pastors came up with, for Pentecost. This was the reason offered. "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost."

I will admit that it caused me to turn to the Bible. That's a good thing. Anytime someone is encouraged to read the Bible, it's good. Keep that in mind this week. The Good Book is a good book. I highly recommend it and when you turn to it, for whatever reason, it is a good thing. "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost."

I looked. It said, "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." (Acts 2:1) It didn't say it was a red place. It might have been. The one place where they are all together, according to the first chapter of Acts, is the room upstairs. We saw them there, last week, the disciples and a few women, in the Upper Room, the room where Jesus gave us this meal and promised to send the Holy Spirit. I've been to that room in Jerusalem, twice. It is above the tomb of King David. It's not red although there is some old paint on the wall that has red in it. But that's from an old Crusader fresco. I don't know if there was any red in the Upper Room in the first century. It doesn't say so. "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost." I looked some more. Verse two says: "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting." (Acts 2:2) Sound doesn't have a color. You can't see sound; you hear it. Wind? I have seen red wind. The red clay of ancestral Oklahoma can get picked up and swirled around. It

looks red. Think dust bowl although when the land got dry, so much soil was picked up that the red clay formed a dark mass; they called it the black blizzard. But it doesn't say a dust bowl red wind came from heaven. You'd have to wonder what sort of gift that would be. After all, the dust bowl was a pandemic of misery, a drought that brought on such suffering, discrimination, loss of homes, jobs, with people desperately hungry. Do you know that pigs were euthanized? People needed food but they were wasted. People were angry. The government was not doing enough to help. It's enough to cause you to see red. It's hard to imagine such a time, at least it used to be. Not now. But it's not a red wind. No, it's not there. "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost."

Now there is a possibility in the next verse. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. (Acts 2:3) Fire can be red, particularly if there are impurities. Burn the batteries in the smartphone, your iPad, your laptop you may be using to watch worship and the lithium will burn red. But most of the time, I don't see red when I see a fire. Glowing embers in the barbeque are red. But not tongues of fire, the flames. I see oranges and yellows. The purest, hottest fire is blue to silver-white. Wouldn't you think the fire from heaven would be the purest? Do you see red when you see tongues of fire at Pentecost? It doesn't say red but the other pastors have it on good report the "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost."

I kept looking. Tongues are mentioned twice. In cartoons, tongues are always bright red. When I was a child, I always drew a tongue with a red crayon. But a healthy human tongue is supposed to be pink with a whitish coat on it. Stick your tongue out and you'll see. Or just look around. There are a lot of people sticking their tongues out at the requirements of reopening. Just wait. You'll see, tongues aren't red. I looked on.

Wine. Maybe it is the wine. "They have had too much wine." Wine used in the Holy Land was common but its type is widely debated. It could have been red wine although the Romans preferred whites. But wine was often cut with water and if red, it would have been more of a rose. Wine was used to kill harmful microorganisms in water, one of the ways people tried to keep from getting sick. Maybe that's the reason alcohol consumption has gone up during the pandemic, a biblical explanation.

But Peter says they weren't drinking, so it can't be the wine. "Because of the imagery in scripture, red is the color associated with Pentecost."

I kept looking for red, down through the passage, beginning with Peter's sermon which starts "Young men shall see visions, and your old men shall

dream dreams.” (Acts 1:17) I always pause at the personal reference about old men. But the word red doesn’t appear anywhere. Why are they seeing red?

I started back through the passage and then it hit me. I don’t know why I missed it at first. But it is there, right in front of me, so familiar today that it makes the daily news. It is a list of “*those people*.” Parthians, Medes, Elamites. Those are people from Iran. We hear about those Iranian’s all of the time. Mesopotamia. That’s Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria. Wait, Syria? Yes, Syrian refugees show up in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Please. Judea, that’s Palestine. Aren’t the Palestinians terrorists? Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, and Pamphylia: Turkey. Given the circumstance, the way Erdoğan is acting, it is hard to tell if they are friend or foe. I wouldn’t trust them. And there it was. Asia. Asia. Where did this all start? You know the feelings people have right now about Asians. You hear it a lot.

Now I think I’m beginning to understand where seeing red comes. There are people from Egypt and Cyrene. What is the phrase, “people of color?” They are there, along with Arabs. Have you looked carefully at this list? I once had an elder tell me this list made him see red. “What’s wrong with this list?” I asked. You make me lead worship and read all those names. I can't help but see red.

And some people are that way. They see groups of people, people who look different, speak a different language, have a different ancestry, sound different, have different political views and they can get worked up, angry, enraged seeing red. Like Thursday. I left work and hit the traffic jam at Fall Creek and 79th. I pulled up behind a black SUV with several political stickers on the back. One read democratsrmentallyill.com. Huh, I didn’t know that. Traffic moved forward and we ended up side by side. I was in the turn lane and he was going straight. I had to look over and who should I see but one of ours. He smiled and waved. I waved back wondering if he’d see red if he knew that I am one of the mentally ill.

I’ll admit it made me feel sad. Do you feel this way? How can you not? I know inclusiveness has never been our strong suit. Some of what we are experiencing goes back centuries. But the fault lines have grown wider. We were moving farther apart and then this. Frustration is high. Any injustice can cause protests. Prejudice, xenophobia, racism behind every mask. Grand canyons of divisions. Everybody is seeing red. I confess it, for you and me.

I drove on troubled and stopped at the dry cleaners. There is a new clerk. I don’t know where the previous manager went. I liked her, prayed for her when she had her babies. She disappeared during the stay-in-place order.

The new clerk has a thick southern accent and a quick tongue, always with something to say. The first time I dropped off my bag of clothes, she said, "Look at you, knowing the ropes. You could work here." Or Monday, I asked, "Will these be ready Thursday?" and she said, "You know it already; no need to say it."

I wasn't ready for her banter on Thursday, thinking about everyone seeing red. She took me off guard when I picked up my clothes. "I like that red shirt," she said, as she hung it on the rack. "Thank you. I'm wearing it Sunday." "Look at you, pulling out Valentine's shirt. Seeing red everyone will think love."

Red, the color of passion, the color of the heart, the color of love. "Seeing red everyone will think love." "Look at you, writing my sermon. You know the ropes."

For God so loved the world...he saw red, saw the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; the residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome, Cretans, and Arabs. Saw red so he sent Jesus for the Iranians and Iraqi, Syrian refugees and Palestine terrorists, Asians whether American, Japanese, or Chinese, people of color, black and brown, republicans and democrats, the masked and unmasked....

That whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Wait, wait, wait. There it is, at the very end of Peter's speech. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'(Acts 2:21). If we worship a God who loves everyone, why is there so much anger and rage instead of love? You know it already; no need to say it...but I will. We need to catch something contagious. We need to be infected. The Holy Spirit needs to fill everyone us.

I know. I know. It's a dream, but as you heard, old men can dream dreams. Come Holy Spirit, fill us, with compassionate eyes, that we might see red for everyone, see everyone with love.