

**The Meaning of This Mystery**  
**Acts 2:1-21 and John 16:4b-15**  
**23 May 2021 – Pentecost Sunday**

Do any of you like **mysteries**... murder mysteries, detective stories... where someone like Sherlock Holmes, after **observing** certain things, then spends time figuring out what they **mean**? In one Sherlock Holmes story, **Silver Streak**, a wealthy man's prize racehorse has been stolen – taken out of its stable in the middle of the night. A **guard** dog also lived in the stable. But **somehow**, it seems, it completely **missed** the heist. It alerted no one that an intruder had broken in. It didn't bark, didn't growl... didn't make a peep. *That's curious*, Holmes thought. It **meant** something. (What it **meant** was that the intruder was someone the dog knew; someone it **wouldn't** have barked at. It **meant** that the robbery was an **inside** job. The villain was the dog's owner!)

In the reading this morning from **Acts**, a **kind** of mystery story is told. Something curious happens. Early one morning several **Galilean** peasants start speaking in languages from all over the **world**... proclaiming in those **foreign** tongues the mighty works of God. And someone – **perhaps** Sherlock Holme-stein – raises the question: *What does it mean?* **Some** of those present very **quickly** respond, *What it means is, they're drunk... drunk on new wine. They're drunk. Nothing more. That's all it means.* But one of the disciples, Peter, **hearing** this, stands and offers **another** explanation.

*First, he counters, These guys aren't drinking. It's not even 9am... and everyone knows you can't get wine in this town 'til noon. This can't be explained by drunkenness. No, to understand what this means, you need to remember what it says in the scriptures... in the book of Joel... where God says what he intends to do just before judgment day.*

*In the last days, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men see visions,  
your old men dream.*

*What you're hearing and seeing today is the result of God having poured out his Spirit on this group of persons who are, all of them, followers of Jesus Christ. And what it means is that God's judgment day is now at hand.*

*So, if you want to be **saved** from judgment, **now** is the time to call upon the name of the Lord. And, by the way, it should interest you that the person God has **appointed** Lord answers to the name of **Jesus**.*

**People** in Jerusalem **that** day **heard** the disciples speaking in foreign tongues... **saw** them boldly proclaiming the mighty works of God... **observed** that curiosity, that **mystery**... and **asked**, *What does it mean?*

And, **why** wouldn't people who are in **this** community, hearing what **you're** saying, and watching what you're **doing**... why wouldn't **they** be **wondering**, just the **same**, *What does it mean?*

What **does** it mean that **you** take part in Bon Air's life and ministry, many of you, **every** Sunday, and some of you several **more** days every week? That you greet one another with **sincere** warmth and concern; that you **gather** in this room, in person or virtually... before this cross, this font, this table; that you bow your heads and confess your need of grace, pray and offer heartfelt praise, attend to the scriptures with reverence, and respond with faith; that you give significant sums of **money**... as well as time... to what you're **involved** in here; that you pray for **others**, both friends **and** enemies, everyday; that you speak honestly and listen respectfully to others here with whom you differ; that you show compassion to persons in pain... that you are generous to the poor... bring in food to feed the hungry... and tell people who're **perplexed** and disheartened about the surpassing love of God in Christ. What does it **mean**?

In this day, it wouldn't **surprise** me to hear **some** folks saying that what it **means** is that you're **naïve** at best... that you're **fools** more likely... and **possibly even** a bit **unbalanced** – maybe by that grape juice you drink here on occasion! Some might call you **sheep**... saying that you **huddle together** in church because you don't have the brains or the intestinal fortitude to make it on your **own** in the real world. Or, they **might say** that all this religious **activity** basically rises from some weird **guilt** you feel or from a hunger you have for the **approval** of others. That's **all** it **means**, they'd say. **Something** like that. Nothing more.

But, if **you** were the ones answering the question, I suspect I'd hear a **great** deal more... some very **different** answers. I suspect I'd **hear** that, to **you**, your activity in this church, your life of faith and service, **means** that you have been met by God in Jesus Christ and that you've embraced him as your

Savior. It reflects your understanding that in Christ God has **claimed** you for his own, has **shown** you mercy, has **called** you to **serve**, and showers you with His Spirit. *What it means, you'd say, is that God has blessed us, and we are responding. God is **with** us, you'd say, here, in our common life – grounding us, centering us, strengthening us... instructing and guiding us, helping and satisfying us... and making us **more** than conquerors. It means, you'd say, that we are living **in hope** because of what God has promised us in Christ. It means **all** of this, you'd say, and much, much **more**... because, with the Spirit of **God** at work in our lives, we can't help **but** anticipate **more!***

To some who're **out** there, it's a mystery **why** you do the things you're involved in here. But it's no mystery to you, is it?! Not at all. **You** do **what** you do because it means so **much** to you and to others! And **what** it means has mostly to do with **God!**

In the selection from John's gospel, we heard **Jesus** telling his disciples that while **he** was going to the **Father**, the **Spirit** would be coming to **them**. Christ **called** the Spirit both *the Counselor* and *the Spirit of truth*; and he **said** that the Spirit would guide them *into all the truth*. **Some** of the truth he'd **already** shared with them; but, **evidently**, there was **more** to come. Some truth they'd been **ready** to receive; but not all of it. For some truth, it seems, it was necessary for them to be more mature or in other circumstances before they could understand it.

When a **child** asks *Where do babies come from*, you can say, *from God*, and be telling the truth. You could also say a lot more... and be telling the truth; but until a child's grown up a bit, it may not be particularly helpful. *When the disciples could bear it*, Christ said... when they were **ready** to receive the Spirit that he'd send them, the Spirit would **guide** them into **all** the truth.

The **Spirit** is guiding you now... is guiding us **into** the truth. The **truth**... about God. The truth about yourself. The truth about others... and about the future coming for us all in Jesus Christ. That widening, deepening truth affects how we live our lives, every day.

**Because** the Spirit **continues** to be poured out upon us; because the Spirit **continues** to guide us into the **truth**; because the Spirit controls **us** (and not we the Spirit), **this means**, 1) that God is not through with us yet; 2) that while some things, like God's **love**, **will** remain **constant** in our lives, other

things are going to evolve and change; and 3) that though we cannot **know** precisely what our future will bring, or where we will end up, we **can** trust God to be guiding us there.

You might say that **Reformed** Christians like us, who understand ourselves as always **being** reformed by the Spirit, take what we've **been given** in our church life... take it **seriously**... but not **too** seriously... believing, as we **do**, that more is certainly coming.

To be Presbyterian means working... trying... to stay balanced between what God in Christ **has** done... and what God the Spirit **will** do. It means being balanced, being grounded and **centered** always **in God**... Who, though he'll always be **something** of a mystery for us, has gone to great lengths to ensure that his **love** for us is no **mystery** to us. No, his **love** has come in **person to** us... in the person of Jesus... God with us... our Lord and our life... our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. God's love has **come** in person **to us**. And that means heaven to me! And heaven for you, as well!