

In 1955 Walt Disney and Disney Studios were at the peak of both national and international success. *Lady and the Tramp* was about to be released as the first animation to be filmed in Cinemascope, and Disney was advancing his empire in the relatively new media of television. But Disney's pride and joy was his new project about to open near Anaheim, California.

Disney had always felt that amusement parks were both seedy and limited in scope and imagination, and he had set out to transform that section of the entertainment industry. Disneyland would be a kind of park that had never been seen or imagined – clean, safe, and built upon the creative genius of the Disney animators and engineers. Disney himself wasn't sure if the concept of a theme park would catch on with the public, and his doubts were reinforced when, 3 years earlier, he had initially presented the idea to the Burbank city council.

Burbank rejected the proposal to build Disneyland in their city, citing that such a large amusement facility would create hideous traffic, noise, and bring in the "riff-raff" associated with carnivals and fairgrounds. Amusement park owners expressed their belief that any such park would close within the first year, but Disney would not be dissuaded. Having finally secured a swath of acreage adjacent to the Santa Ana Freeway, Disneyland began construction in July, 1954 with the impossible goal of opening in the July 1955.

The park was not nearly ready when opening day arrived, but Disney decided to open it anyway and invite the media from all over the world to attend, along with 5000 ticketed guests. The result was a jamboree of confusion and calamity. As the LA Times stated in an article about the opening, "Traffic was backed up for seven miles on the Santa Ana

Freeway, and the 5,000 expected guests mushroomed to 28,154, thanks to scores of counterfeit tickets. Flames licked at Sleeping Beauty Castle because of a gas leak. Water washed across the overloaded deck of the Mark Twain Riverboat. Ronald Reagan, who was one of the television broadcast hosts, was forced to scale the wall of Frontierland to make one of his scheduled appearances. At one point, Disney got locked in his apartment above the fire station and couldn't get out.”

After the madness of opening day, Disney and his new park were roundly criticized in the press. Newspaper headlines declared: “Walt's Nightmare.” The media predicted a quick and early demise.” As it turned out, the media was very mistaken. Within two months of the disastrous opening, the park welcomed its 1 millionth visitor, and as of today, June 4th, over 750 million visitors have made their way to what became known as “the happiest place on earth.” To put it another way, Walt Disney threw a party for the world in 1955, and people, responding to Disney’s vision and invitation, are still coming to celebrate.

2000 years ago, one threw a party for the world, and while many greeted that party’s first day with criticism, confusion, and cynicism, the party still goes on, with an attendance record that is even beyond the reach of Walt Disney’s imagination. We are attending that party today. We, along with millions of Christians all over the world come to Pentecost – a celebration to recognize the age of the Holy Spirit, initiated by God, given through Christ, and as real and as present today as it was that day in first-century Jerusalem. In the Jewish religion of Christ’s day, Pentecost was a celebration of the wheat harvest, which took place on a different day each year between the months of May or June. It was a

pilgrim festival, which meant that Jews from all over the known world travelled to Jerusalem to participate.

Throughout the gospels Jesus made a promise to his followers – after he was gone, they would receive a new kind of power, a power which they would share directly with him and with God. In the gospel of John, Jesus identifies this promised gift as he stands in the temple on the last day of the Festival of the Booths: “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 heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The Festival of the Booths at which Jesus spoke those words was the celebration of the Fall harvest, the last celebration before the time of winter. If we look at the progression of these festivals in the gospels as they relate to the ministry of Christ, we can see sum total of Christ’s work leading up to the day of Pentecost. Jesus announces the coming of the Spirit at the celebration of the last harvest; he then goes to his death and resurrection during the time of the Passover in the Spring, when new life springs forth in abundance; at the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, the disciples received the gift that Jesus had promised not long after the Passover: a gift which commenced a Spiritual harvest.

The fact that Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit while teaching at the Festival of the Booths is important. The Festival of Booths centered its sacramental activity on water. It was the tradition of the priests to stand behind an altar that had two gutters on either side, which met in the middle in the front. On the last day, at the climax of the Festival, a priest on one side would pour water into one gutter and a priest on the other side would

pour wine, and the two sacramental elements would meet in the middle in front of the people. This represented God's promise to Israel that, after the cold and dark of Winter, Spring would return, the seed would grow, the rain would fall, and the fields would yield its harvest so that life may continue.

Jesus took this imagery of pouring water and wine and applied it to the new life he was about to bring to all creation – the life of the Spirit, the life eternal, which would pour itself into the hearts of all believers, and flow out of those hearts as Christ's church in the world. Just as Christ transformed the Passover into the Eucharist, he promised that God would transform the Pentecost, from a celebration of hope for another year of food, to a celebration of a new age, an age without the count of years or days, an age of transformation that is still transforming the world.

You might recall from the story in Acts that on that day of Pentecost there was a great deal of confusion and criticism. Astonished Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world heard the followers of Christ speaking in their own languages. The disciples were not babbling non-sense, but they were doing exactly what we are doing today, and what Christians have been doing for 2000 years – declaring the good news of the love and salvation of Jesus Christ.

Those same two dynamics still drive the age of the Spirit as we continue in it. For we who believe, the spirit-driven life of discipleship is a celebration – a joyous response to the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, lived out in an infinite variety of ways, but always grounded in the same Spirit. For others, Christians are little more than fools, clinging to a desperate belief in a corrupted church light years from its long-dead leader. But just because some

refuse to believe, that doesn't change what started at Pentecost. God is still throwing a party and inviting the world to come and join. Countless souls have joined, experiencing the transformation of the Holy Spirit, and that is why we must never stop inviting and never stop celebrating.

So, on this Pentecost, let us come to the table, not to break bread and pour wine, but through those acts to let the Holy Spirit pour the life and love of God into our hearts. What a joy it is to know such a God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; what a joy it is to be loved; what a joy it is to love and care for others in the name of Christ as the Spirit leads us. It is the greatest party ever, and it is ours to share.