



Offered By Rev. Crispin Ilombe Wilondja

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Often, friends and congregants ask about the connection a psalm has with the other lessons, or what good news the psalm may convey for our world today. For Pentecost, in each year of our three-year cycle, we are invited to sing or read responsively parts of Psalm 104. Why this psalm on this day? What does it tell us about Pentecost? What good news can one find in this biblical text? Rather than an exegetical work, I want to share my understanding of this psalm as Immigrant and Pastor to find the good news for refugees and other immigrants like myself.

To understand more clearly this portion of Scripture, it is good to consider the whole of Psalm 104. After reading the entire psalm, I realize that the major theme is that God is the master of creation, able to control all creatures - even the Leviathan. Verse 24, which begins our text for today, reveals clearly that in wisdom God made all creatures. Verses 27-28 explain how God gives to all creatures whatever they need. Therefore, experiencing God's love and power throughout creation, the psalmist proclaims that he will sing to the Lord as long as he lives, and he will praise God while he has his being (Psalm 104:33).

On this Pentecost Sunday, Psalm 104 is a call to discover the power of God's Spirit, the climax in understanding the Pentecost celebration. It is the day that the Holy Spirit filled the Apostles and they were able to speak in other languages (Acts 2:4) so that people heard the Apostles' words in their own native tongues (Acts 2:5). In Psalm 104, God sends forth the Spirit to create and to renew the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30). This is the Spirit of God in action, the mystery of Pentecost revealed, and the fulfilment of Jesus' promise to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Psalm 104 then becomes a call to be aware of God's presence by the Holy Spirit through which Christians become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17a).

There are immigrants and refugees in our world today who are afraid every day, often feeling excluded and not welcomed. We watch the news about children being separated from their parents and we hear of deportations on a daily basis. Meditating on this portion of Psalm 104 brings comfort and consolation to me as an immigrant. This psalm tells me that immigrants and refugees are also creatures of God. God who is Lord of creation loves them. The good news today for refugees and immigrants is that on this Pentecost Sunday, Psalm 104 brings confidence that our God can and will protect those who seek refuge in God. I am consoled to discover that God is master over creation and that no creature is beyond God's control. God is God!

When I meditate on this Psalm and look back on my life, I discover that I cannot avoid applying the psalmist's words to myself. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will praise God while I have my being. In fact, I came to America as an asylum seeker in September 2011. I was obliged to flee my home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, where my life was threatened and I was about to be killed. I arrived in the United States where I was granted asylum status after 9 months and I was able to start my life again. On July 20, 2018, I became a U.S. citizen. Today, I am free, and I experience God's presence in my life. I realize that God is in control of my life. I am the Crispin I am today because God has been in control of my life - feeding me, leading me and filling my life with good things. Today I am very happy to sing, "Bless the Lord, O my soul. Hallelujah!"



On Pentecost Sunday, Psalm 104: 24-34.35b is a revelation. God sends the Holy Spirit to all creatures - among them immigrants and refugees. God gives them food (Psalm 104:27-28) and the breath of life, without which they could not survive (Psalm 104:29-30). Praise be to God who is in control of who we are, now and forever.

Offered by the Rev. Emmanuel Jackson

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In his classic *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut paints an interesting picture of a world quite different from that of World War II. In his new world, planes fly backward, magically quelling flames as they draw fragmented bombs into steel containers and suck them back up into their bellies. Guns on the ground suck metal fragments from the pilots, crew, and planes. Weapons are shipped backed to factories, where they are carefully disassembled and broken down into their constituent minerals. The minerals are shipped to specialists all over the world who “hide them cleverly” in the ground, “so they never hurt anybody ever.” What an imagination!

Walter Brueggemann is one of the world’s great teachers about the Hebrew prophets. He describes the prophets and poets of ancient times as being without pedigree, uncredentialed, rooted in the covenantal tradition, who through the gift of their insight imagined their world differently from the harsh realities of daily living. Brueggemann translates their imagination from the chaos of ancient times to our own. In his book, *Prophetic Imagination* we are challenged to “reframe” so we too can experience the social realities that are before our very eyes.

Imagine, or reframe with me a world so interconnected that everyone speaks the same language and works to alleviate pain and suffering. Imagine or reframe a world so interconnected and relatable that the burdens of one individual become the burden of everyone. Imagine or reframe a world where love and compassion are the ethical basis of all the decisions we make.

I was born and raised in Liberia, West Africa, a country of 16 different dialects. My dad was a Lutheran pastor and church developer. I remember that the first time I heard my dad preach about the Tower of Babel, the story confounded my young mind. I struggled to fathom the chaos the biblical communities faced when suddenly everyone had a different tongue, and no one could understand what was being communicated. I could relate because tribal identity or differences in Liberia often formed the basis of how people treated one another. This remains true today—we live in a world where people are treated according to how they look or what language they speak. This becomes evident in the rhetoric that is used today by our leaders to describe refugees and immigrants. My young mind wrestled profoundly with tribal ethnic conflicts. My tribe, the Kpelle, was numerically large but didn’t really have much social, political or economic clout. I struggled to fathom why people who shared the same nationality, but different speech, could not find a way to co-exist. In the naivete of my young mind, I had a prophetic imagination: I thought to myself, “Wow...how cool it would be to speak one language and play with kids from the other tribes. How cool would it be if we didn’t have all the tribal fights?” What an imagination!



The oral tradition that gave rise to the Babel narrative allowed ancient communities to grapple with the complexities of their times: diverse languages, human migration, the formation of communal structures, and the rules that govern how people live together. In the Babel narrative, people are dispersed and confused. In the Pentecost narrative, they are gathered with a new language given by the Spirit. The author of Acts describes the gathering this way: They are Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—all declaring the wonders of God.

Those who witnessed the Pentecost experience asked, “What does this mean?” In a way, this is the author’s attempt to reframe the world through the prophetic imagination described by Brueggemann. It is also an invitation to us to participate in our own version of prophetic imagination. “What does this mean?” is an invitation to all of us to partner with the Spirit in the activity of reframing. How do we reframe our world - from being a place where we are scattered - to becoming a place where we are gathered into a beloved community?

As an immigrant and refugee, I feel called to the task of reframing Babel and Pentecost—the world of scattered and gathered. I feel called to lend my voice to the task of imagining a world where the treatment refugees, migrants and “the least of these” becomes a true measure of our moral and ethical commitment. Refugees are often the first and last casualties of war: helpless and defenseless...left at the mercy of war profiteers and forces beyond their own sphere of control. The truth is that no one volunteers to be a refugee. Refugees love their countries of origin, but because of circumstances beyond their control they must resort to the most basic of human instincts: survival. When refugees find safety and hope in another land, they often give their best in service to their new-found homeland.

So, what does all this mean for you as people of faith? What does it mean for you to read the Pentecost text in our current reality? What does it mean for you to imagine the world as it could be, not just as it is.

Let’s be partners in reframing the narrative about refugees and immigrants.