

Fifty Days Further

A morality play for Shavuot and Pentecost

by Paul Deane

Note: This play was originally written as a drama for performance by the children of the congregation that I attend during the week that encompasses the Jewish feast of Shavuot, celebrated by the Christian church as the occasion of Pentecost. It dramatizes the events of the first chapter of the Biblical book of Acts. It illustrates rather nicely the effectiveness of alliterative verse as a vehicle for verse drama.

(In the distance voices are chanting ...)

Pilgrims:

Rise up! Rise up! The road goes before us –
The pilgrim's path to the place of joy!
These heights are near heaven – how we rejoice
At the glitter of gold from its glowing walls!
May my soul be swifter than a swallow's wings
and rise to its resting place, Jerusalem, my goal!

(enter pilgrims, carrying first fruits, sacks of grain, etc.)

(enter priest. Priest blows a shofar.)

Priest:

When Passover has passed, the chief priest shall
count Fifty days further. Then from far and near
God's people shall gather gladly to praise him.
So bring in the fruits of your fields and pastures,
Heap up the harvest till hearts overflow,
show it to God, then share with the poor.

Pilgrims:

Such a mass of men from so many nations!
From Egypt, from Italy, and from Asia Minor,
from Phrygia, Pamphylia, and far-off Persia,
from Libya, Galilee, and this land of Judah
we have come to proclaim that our King is God,
and give him due glory for all his great wonders!

(This has by now become a crowd scene. Enter two Pharisees,
one of them named Saul, though he may not be the Saul of the
New Testament. It is a common name.)

First Pharisee:

Saul, are you certain?

Saul:

This deception is over!

We'll have no tall tales of tombs standing open,
No prophets on donkeys, no palm branches waving!
This fantasy is finished!

First Pharisee:

I fear that our people still hunger for marvels.

Saul:

Ha! That they may!

But the Law is the lesson they must learn to respect!

They seek false Messiahs with sin in their hearts.

Just give a good show, and that's good enough

to make happy morons! But more is required.

To be obedient is better by far,

And the proper approach to pleasing our God.

Our life is the letter of the law. Yeshua –

that man was a maniac or maybe possessed

with parables for prostitutes, preaching that love

made law-breaking legal! I'd like to believe

we've heard nonsense enough. Never mind him –

What's this?

(A crowd of the disciples suddenly spill out onto the street.

They are praising God in many different languages.)

(simultaneously)

First Disciple:

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Et in terra pax hominibus

Bonae voluntatis.

Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.

Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.

Gratias agimus tibi

propter magnam gloriam tuam.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,

Deus Pater omnipotens.

Domine Fili unigenite Iesu Christe.

Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,

Filius Patris.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,

Miserere nobis.

Second Disciple:

Khosh be hale un kasan ke
Faghre roohe khod be danand
Khosh be hale mardomi ke
Malekane un jahanand.

Khosh be hale frutanan
Khosh be hale rahiman
Khosh be hale meskiman
Khosh be hale shoma.

Khosh be hale pakdelan ke
Khosh be hale salehan ke
U ra binand chonke
Aanan farzandane khoda hastand.

Khosh be hale gham-gosaran
Khosh be hale maatam-daran
Khosh be hale ma ke dadim
Ghalbe khod ra be massiha.

Third Disciple:

Alleluia: fai pe pi eho-oo eta
ep Chois thamiof: maren thelil
en ten oonof emmon enkhitf:

O Ep Chois ek-e nahmen:

O Ep Chois ek-e sooten nen moit:

Ef-esmaro-oot enje fi ethnioo

khen ef raan

em ep Chois:

Alleluia.

Fourth Disciple:

Axios ei labein to biblion,

Kai anoixai tas sphragidas autou,

Hoti esphages kai egorasas toi theoi en toi haimati sou

Ek pases phulys kai glosses kai laou kai ethnous

Kai epoiesas autous toi theoi hemon basileian kai

hiereis, Kai basileusousin epi tes ges.

Axios estin to arnion to esphagmenon labein

Ten dunamin kai plouton kai sophian kai iskhun

Kai timen kai doxan kai eulogian.

Saul:

How dare they! They're drunk! Dowsed to the gills,
filled with the fruit of some fervent vine!

They are stewed! They are stoned! Stripped of all
sense, like mumbling madmen or muttering fools!

Peter:

Sir, we are sober! Be certain of that.

It's the middle morning, and when men get drunk
partying past midnight they pass out cold
by the middle morning, or maybe they stir
with hammering head, or with heaving guts.

But look! They're alert and alive with joy,
Filled with the fruit of a fervent heart!

Their speech is inspired, for the spirit moves them
As was plainly prophesied by the prophet Joel.

In the last days – lo – as the Lord proclaims
all flesh shall overflow, filled by my Spirit.
For a sign shall be seen in your sons and
daughters – Visions revealed to the very
youngest, a deluge of dreams dealt to their
elders. Man and maid servant will be moved in
spirit with a prophet's power –

Saul (aside): (How perfectly mad.)

Pilgrims (together):

Glory to God! Is this gift upon us?

Peter:

Consider the man whom miracles attested,
Yeshua of Nazareth. You know what wonders
God sent, what signs you saw him achieve.
Yes, his life was taken by lawless men,
But who handed him over, helped or stood by?
Yet all this was planned in the presence of God,
by whose power he passed the perils of Hell.
As its says in the Psalms, Messiah's too holy
for the Lord to allow Him to lie in the Pit.
He lives now as Lord whom the Lord has raised
And we on whom this wonder fell witnessed His glory.

Saul stands in utter astonishment as the
pilgrims crowd around Peter and the disciples.

First Pilgrim (tearing his garments):

We are blind! We are blind, and bound up in darkness!

Second Pilgrim (sinking to his knees):

Sodom and Gomorrah are safer from judgement!

Third Pilgrim (looking at his tzitzit, and speaking quietly):

The law is no comfort – I am lost indeed.

The Pilgrims together:

Men and brothers – what should we do?!

Peter:

Repent and confess in the presence of God.

Accept the Messiah's sacrificed blood

as the water that washes you whiter than snow

Then you too will be filled with fire from heaven,

Till the Spirit of God spills from your hearts.

(The pilgrims crowd forward in a kind of babble, speaking variously) :

Pilgrims:

Save me!

I'm sorry!

My sin is so great!

Forgive me

Be gracious!

O God, I am yours!

(Saul then turns away in disgust, saying):

Saul:

Let's report to the priest. He'll put down this folly.

2nd Pharisee:

I fear Saul you may find yourself fighting God.

(Peter, the disciples, and the pilgrims now join together and march joyfully along.)

Peter:

We have gathered together that God may be praised!

The fields are full, but few come to work them,

So haul in the harvest, and heap it up high!

Pilgrims and disciples together:

Rise up! Rise up! The road goes before us –

The pilgrim's path to the place of joy!

These heights are near heaven – how we rejoice

At the glitter of gold from its glowing walls!

May my soul be swifter than a swallow's wings

and rise to its resting place, reach heaven my goal!

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