

## **Day of Pentecost – May 31, 2020**

### **Liturgical Note about Pentecost**

**The festival of Pentecost**, celebrated fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, is the last of the three great festivals in the Church year. **On Christmas Day**, we celebrate the birth of Jesus as we receive God's assurance that humankind has not been abandoned to its sin. **On Easter morning**, God overcame the power of sin, death, and the devil by the resurrection of Jesus. **And finally on Pentecost**, God sent the Holy Spirit upon those who followed Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of Christ among those who believe in him.

**Pentecost** also marks the beginning of the Church. On **Pentecost**, the Holy Spirit fell upon the followers of Jesus, enabling them to speak openly about all that they had seen and heard. Nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit could change simple fisher folk into fearless evangelists. They became the spearhead of a movement that, in thirty years, would shake the very foundations of Roman society. Today, the Church remembers its birth on **Pentecost**. With coming of the Holy Spirit, its ministry and its people are empowered to carry on the work of Jesus until he comes again.

### **Introduction**

Last Sunday, we explored the implications of Jesus' Ascension for disciples past and present. **Our theme was 'What now?'** The question is still relevant for us as we wait for relief from the restrictions that the Coronavirus has forced upon our lives. This past week, it became very real when our political leaders suggested that our sanctuaries again open for in person worship, despite strong cautionary words from medical practitioners and public health officials. **What now?**

In a way, the story of Pentecost is God's answer to **'What now.'** We are to tell the story of Jesus within our communities. I do believe that God will provide not only the opportunities for our individual and unique proclamation of the Gospel. I also believe that the gift of God's Holy Spirit [the Presence of the Resurrected Christ] will give us the means to do this task.

This may well be in a different context than we have envisioned on past Pentecost Sundays. **How do we tell the story of Jesus when we are sheltering in place; socially distancing from family and friends; and wearing masks that quickly become uncomfortable?** I wish I could give specific answers; but I cannot. Nonetheless, I believe that we who follow Jesus are still the recipients of God's Holy Spirit who are called to share the story of Jesus in words and, more importantly, how we live our lives. This is what evangelism really is.

In our present situation, we still have many opportunities. It may well require that we continue social distancing, wearing masks, and sheltering in place as we put the needs of others before our own. I have no doubt that this is the course that our Lord Jesus would follow. The greatest and immediate gift of the Holy Spirit may well be patience as we continue in this ‘*new normal*’ that has now become our lives.

***What does this mean for corporate worship?*** This is still to be determined. We will follow our Bishop’s guidance which will take into account the input of the public health and medical communities. As we continue our walk together in preparing for our next called pastor, the church councils of each congregation and I will act to protect your health while yet being faithful to the tasks given us by the Holy Spirit. If you have any concerns, please feel free to contact me. [email: [seolson322@gmail.com](mailto:seolson322@gmail.com); cell: 218-290-6244]

***In Christ ✝,  
Pastor Steve***

#### ***Scripture Lesson – Acts 2.1-21***

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, - <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> *In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall*

prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

### **Gospel – John 14.15-27**

Jesus said to his disciples, "<sup>15</sup>If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Advocate**, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. <sup>18</sup>I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

<sup>22</sup>Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

<sup>23</sup>Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup>Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup>I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the **Advocate, the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

### **'Something to Say'**

**Let us pray.** Dearest God, hear our words and give us the faith we profess. As you touched the hearts of the first disciples with the fire of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, rekindle the fire of the Gospel within us. Through your Spirit, you call us in Baptism to be your children, you enlighten us with the knowledge of your love, and you sanctify us as saints for eternity. Send your Spirit upon us to make us workers in the Kingdom who give faithful witness to the One who died so that we might live. We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Brothers and sisters, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

It was the dinner of dinners in Washington D.C – the toast of the banquet circuit. Those attending were a virtual **Who's Who** in the world of science . . . Physicists, chemists, biologists, and mathematicians. There were enough elected officials to make it the most prestigious event on the social calendar. That evening, Albert Einstein was to give the after-dinner address. He was a man so unique that only a select few had the intellect to share his vision of the universe. For better or worse, his simple equation,  $E = mc^2$ , opened the door to the atomic age. Its simplicity amazed the world. But on that September evening in 1952, Albert Einstein once again gave cause for amazement. He stood at the podium and waited for the applause to die away. In the quiet that followed, he began to speak. Albert Einstein said, **'I have nothing to say this evening. I'll come back when I do.'** And then he sat down. A shocked silence fell over the crowd . . . an awkward . . . embarrassed . . . when-will-it-end silence that soon gave way to anger and indignation.

After their Master's resurrection, the disciples were also silent; not because they wanted to, but because they were doing as Jesus asked. Before his ascension, Jesus said to them, **'AND BEHOLD, I SEND THE PROMISE OF MY FATHER UPON YOU; BUT STAY IN THE CITY, UNTIL YOU ARE CLOTHED WITH THE POWER FROM ON HIGH . . . JOHN BAPTIZED WITH WATER, BUT BEFORE MANY DAYS, YOU SHALL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.'** With these words, Jesus was lifted up from them into heaven. A shocked silence fell over the disciples . . . an awkward, embarrassed when-will-it-end silence.

**We know a lot about embarrassing silences.** So often it seems that we should say something and do not; or, do something and cannot. Being a follower of Jesus is no different. It is difficult business. We all have questions – even clergy. *How do we share what is important to us? How do we convince others to join us here as we worship? What exactly do we say? And what if they say 'not interested?'* Sometimes, we just live with those awkward, embarrassed, when-will-it-end times of silence. We need help.

**'Do we have something to say?'** There are those who pose the same question to the Church also. *'Do you have something to say in this world of ours . . . **A world** that is in economic upheaval . . . **A world** where family life is under pressures that other generations could never imagine . . . **A world** where we are together with more people but have never felt so isolated, especially now because of Covid-19? . . . **A world** where people are judged by race, gender, sexual preference, immigration status, social standing or economic worth? Does the Church have something to say that is relevant to those who come looking for guidance and support? Or better yet, does God have something to say?'*

**Today is Pentecost Sunday . . .** And today God says, **'Yes I have something to say.'** Pentecost is God speaking to the world . . . God speaking through the Church as it tells the story of God's healing love for our broken world . . . God speaking through those claimed baptism as they take up the ministry of Jesus.

**First, God has something to say to you and me as believers** In the Gospel of John, when Jesus tells the disciples that he must leave them, he promises to send the **'Advocate'** or the **'Counselor'** to them. The word that Jesus uses to refer to the Holy Spirit is **'Parakletos** [**'Paraclete.'**] **'Paraclete'** comes from a Greek word having two meanings; the first being **'one called to the side of another for aid and comfort'** and the second, **'one who convinces, counsels, and strengthens.'** To be the **Paraclete** is to be all of these. In John's Gospel, the **Paraclete** is pre-eminently the Revealer of Christ to believers. The Advocate brings believers to faith and strengthens them . . . The Spirit of Truth, the guide to Christ, who himself is the Truth.

As the revealer of Christ, the Holy Spirit takes the place of Jesus' presence; being present himself at the side of each disciples. Jesus said, **'I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU DESOLATE, I WILL COME TO YOU . . . IN THAT DAY, YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM IN THE FATHER, AND YOU IN ME, AND I IN YOU.'** The unity of Jesus and the Father is extended to the believer by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the alter-ego of Jesus. More simply put: for all disciples, for you and me, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the *Living Presence of Christ in our lives*. We are not alone; Jesus is with each one of us.

We receive the Holy Spirit when we are baptized. We become Spirit-borne co-workers of Christ; called to proclaim that **God's most precious possession is humanity – You and me**. God will go to any length to recover that which is lost, even a lonely cross outside of Jerusalem.

**Second, God has something to say to you and me as the Church. Pentecost** marks the beginning of the Church. On **Pentecost**, the Holy Spirit fell upon the followers of Jesus, enabling them to speak openly about all that they had seen and heard. They suddenly had the courage to tell the story of Jesus to an unbelieving and hostile world. Nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit could change simple-minded fishermen into fearless evangelists. They became the spearhead of a movement that, in thirty years, would shake the very foundations of Roman society.

The Church remembers its birth on **Pentecost**. With coming of the Holy Spirit, its ministry and its people are empowered to carry on the work of Jesus until he comes again. Pentecost may well be the most important celebration of the Church year.

Sometimes the church is called the ‘*communion of saints*.’ The word ‘*saint*’ refers to all human beings who believe that God graciously forgives their sin for the sake of Jesus. To be called a ‘*saint*’ means that we are called to be holy or ‘*set apart from the world*.’ Holiness is not a quality of the individual, but rather, a communal state given us through baptism. In other words, we are called to holiness as a community, and we need each other to live out this holiness. We cannot be Christian apart from the Church of Christ. We cannot be Christian apart from each other. To be a Christian is to be in fellowship with God and with each other. And today this sense of fellowship is cushioned in our social distancing and sheltering in place for the sake of others. Nonetheless, we can minister to each other using both our modern technologies or old-fashioned phones calls and letters.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus captures this unique horizontal dimension of the Christian experience. Speaking to disciples, both past and present, Jesus says, **‘A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU . . . BY THIS SIGN ALL WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.’**

We need to hear this time and time again, especially in world where are deeply divided one from another by economic, political, and now how we understand public health concerns. The tragedy of disciples today is that we are hard-pressed to show love for one another; especially when we disagree with each other. This may well be the way of the world today, but it is not the world that Christ envisions for us. We have been called by the Holy Spirit to be different from the world . . . And the sign that we are different is that we love one another as Christ has first loved us.

**When you think about it, Pentecost is a spiritual ‘turning point’ for the Church.** When the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples, their focus changed immediately from self-concern to mission. The change was so startling that bystanders thought that they were ‘drunk with new wine.’ Suddenly, it became imperative for them to share the story of Jesus with us. On Pentecost, those who followed Jesus not only found their voice, but the Holy Spirit gave the words to say and they were words of proclamation.

The nearly two thousand years that separate us from that first Pentecost has changed nothing. Our task is still the same . . . We are called to bear witness to the living Christ who died so that we might live. **We can no longer** focus only on personal spiritual growth because to do so is a perversion of the Gospel imperative for community and mission. **We can no longer** proclaim the Gospel from the safety of our sanctuaries because the first Pentecost brought the disciples out into the streets of Jerusalem with their message.

**And we can no longer** pick and choose those whom we want to be part of the Church because the Holy Spirit compels us to reach out to those in our community who have no church home. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we bear witness to Jesus, we speak kindly of and to one another, we comfort the grieving, we are taught to pray, and we speak for those who have no voice in our society. As the Church, we are the image of Christ that the world experiences today.

**So, what then, do we say?** We begin, I think, with the same words that Peter used on the first **Pentecost**. We tell the story of Jesus -- his life, his death, and his resurrection. If we take the coming of the Holy Spirit seriously, we know that the words will come to us. But one cannot not just tell the story, one must also live the story. This is called sanctification and it too is a work of the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, we are empowered to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgivable, and to console the inconsolable. In short, we take up the ministry of Jesus into our own lives.

Like Peter, we do have something to say. And when we speak, there will be shocked silences . . . Some may even say that we are full of new wine. The world will say that we are illogical and impractical. But it matters not what is said, the promise of the Holy Spirit is that our words will be filled with saving grace. Some will hear our words; others will be touched; and still others will believe. On the first **Pentecost**, some three thousand souls were added to the Church. **With the promise of Pentecost in our hearts, we speak because we do have something to say.** Amen.