

The Feast of Pentecost C

June 5, 2022

Holy Family, Laurel Springs

Peace I leave with you- my own peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. John 14:27

We hear this verse of scripture most often at funerals. And while it is appropriate for those occasions, and hopefully is comforting to those who gather to celebrate the life of a loved one, I like to think that it is also, an everyday life verse. So many times in our lives, and most especially in just these few weeks, our hearts have been troubled and we are afraid. First, there were daily gun violence incidents in our country. Families in Uvalde, Texas are burying the 19 children and 2 educators murdered in the mass shooting at an elementary school. Healthcare workers in Oklahoma City are reeling from the shooting deaths of 4 colleagues in a place where healing should occur. The city of Buffalo is coming to terms with the racially motivated killing of 10 shoppers in the local grocery store. In Iowa, there was another shooting at a house of worship. Don't even get me started about the US economy, the War in Ukraine, the never-ending roller coaster ride of the Corona Virus, and now Monkey Pox. Many are anxious and afraid. Our hearts are indeed times, troubled. However, we have these reassuring words from Jesus that we have been given the Advocate, the

Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be with us forever and will remind us of all that Christ taught.

In case you couldn't tell, today is my favorite feast day. While I love Easter and Christmas, there is just something about Pentecost that makes my heart sing. Could it be that there is red everywhere? Maybe it is because when I was a child, it was celebrated as "the Church's birthday", complete with cupcakes, candles, and red balloons. Who doesn't love that? As you see, I have brought some of that that tradition with me. There are homemade Deacon Delectable cupcakes at Coffee Hour. Nobody is leaving without one!!

There's no better time to celebrate the diversity of the Kingdom of God than on the Day of Pentecost. Separately, our differences are too diverse to list, but woven together, our individual uniqueness creates the beautiful tapestry we call the Body of Christ. Sadly, today we see people and nations torn apart by racism, sexism, man-made borders and cultural bigotry. We have become a culture of us versus them, where the "other" is to be feared and never trusted. This is not a new occurrence, but one would have hoped that humanity would have learned from its past mistakes and recurrent genocides over the ages; however, here we are in the 21st century, repeating history again with chilling efficiency and cruelty. Pentecost is a reminder that God's Holy

Spirit is given freely to all people with no respect for race, culture, socioeconomic standing, gender, sexual identity, or any other distinguishing mark used by people to differentiate one person from another. Pentecost means that that God's Kingdom has been opened to all people. There are **no** boundaries. God pours his Spirit, in Hebrew- **ruah**, His life giving spirit, onto all humankind. This is the same breath, the same Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation and breathed life into Adam and Eve. It is the same ruah, Spirit that appeared as a dove and descended on Christ at his Baptism by John in the Jordan River and on us as well as we were baptized.

The Kingdom of God is for the least, the last and the lost- for those who have and those who have not- for the beat up, the burdened, the unloved, for people from **every** race, nation, tribe, and color. In God, we are one; created, redeemed, and beloved. This is an amazing truth. This is the creation of something very new. This is the birth of the church.

The Evangelist Luke finds himself at the limits of language as he writes of the Pentecost experience in the Acts of the Apostles. Sometimes, words fail. No matter how eloquent the person writing or speaking, words fail to convey human experience. From the emotions of a mother's first sight of her newborn child, to the feeling created by indescribably moving music, or the beauty of a

garden or a rainbow, we can sometimes capture something of an experience, without being able to capture the thing itself. Not everything can be put into words. Luke writes, “When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, **as** of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” This is like when Luke wrote of Jesus’ baptism, “[As he was] praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form **like** a dove.” Not wind. Not fire. Not even a dove. But something **like** wind, fire, and a dove.

In fact, the Pentecost experience was a creative force sending ripples through space and time as the Holy Spirit has remained active in the world. Before that morning, the Jesus Movement was relatively small. The greatest preacher in the world sometimes had thousands on a hillside, but mostly walked and talked with a smaller travelling band of men and women so that they could all be in one place on that 50th day after Easter. By the end of the day, the sum total of Christ-followers would never fit in a single room again. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, calls Pentecost

something like the Big Bang, as all Christianity radiates outward from this moment of creation.

On the Day of Pentecost, people gathered in Jerusalem from all corners of the Roman Empire. They represented competing economic interests, diverse cultures, a myriad of languages and different religious traditions. The disciples were also gathered there just as Jesus had commanded. It is ten days after the Ascension and we have to assume that they (now a crowd of 120) have been together in the city since Jesus departed. Jesus told them that they would receive the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, as today's Gospel refers to it, but He did not specify a time or a place...they simply had to wait. "They were all together in one place." When the church is gathered, the Lord is present. He is present in the praises of His people. He is present through the preaching of the word. He is present in the Eucharist. But most of all, He is present in and through the Holy Spirit. The disciples hadn't "done" anything to call down the Spirit. All they did was gather. Just as we have done today. "When two or three are gathered, I will be there."

God's grace was given freely to all who heard the message preached by Peter, who 53 days earlier, denied he even knew Jesus. But after something like wind and fire, the timid disciples

became bold evangelists and as they proclaimed the Good News of Jesus, people from around the world heard the Gospel in their own mother tongue, and thousands converted to Christ. These aliens who converged on Jerusalem then returned to their homes and spread the message of Christ, and the church began to spread like a wildfire. From its inception, the church has been a diverse group of people who hailed from a variety of cultures and languages. It was in the midst of this great diversity that God sent the Holy Spirit upon his church and started a movement that would change the history of the world forever.

That morning of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came with such power that words could not fully convey the experience, the first thought of those seeing and hearing the disciples was that they had been hitting cheap wine pretty hard. The crowd looked at the messengers and figured that with Galileans, the saying probably wasn't "It's 5:00 somewhere" as an excuse to start drinking. Instead, the saying must be, "It's 9:00 somewhere, Lord knows, it's always 9:00 somewhere."

The crowd was on to something, however, in that the Holy Spirit is always ready to show up in a mighty way. When a friend calls you crying because her husband has left. Or when you go with your mom to that appointment to get the biopsy results. Or when a

co-worker learns his son has been in a car accident. Or when a child calls late at night from jail. In all the times and places when you need God to be present, recall, "It's 9:00 somewhere," and just as the Holy Spirit showed up one Pentecost morning, so God will not leave you comfortless. The Holy Spirit will come to you in all these times and places and so many more.

There are many kinds of pain and suffering and anguish in our world, but there is but one source of healing. And we who know the Great Physician Jesus Christ can offer that comfort and healing to others. Before the week is out and for many of you, before this day is over, you will encounter someone fighting a great battle. And when you bump up against someone in need, remember this sermon and don't hold back. You don't have to get it right. Just trust the Holy Spirit to honor your good intentions. Share Jesus' love in ways small or big. God will handle the rest.

While the idea of asking God to use you in the week ahead might be frightening, know that you have done this before. You have gone for a walk or sat with a friend or co-worker in need. You may have shared a meal and offered a listening ear. Perhaps you have cut the grass for a neighbor who was sick. Each of us has been there for someone else before. The challenge here is to follow the Spirit's lead and then those occasions will be more frequent. While

you might not have thought much about it, that doesn't mean it was not deeply significant for the person you were with. This is not something we do for God, but it is God's gift to us as we are there for someone else when they need it.

When and how might this happen? I have no idea. But I do know this, God came in a mighty way at 9:00 in the morning on that Pentecost, when the Christian Church was born – and it is always 9:00 somewhere. Whenever the Spirit nudges you, just lean in and trust God to be in the midst of the situation, for that creative force that changed the world at Pentecost is still blowing through our lives.

The message of Christ hasn't changed, but those who claim to be his followers have often failed miserably in living up to that message. The greatest temptation facing Christians isn't necessarily losing their passion, but rather, losing sight of the fact that in Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, male nor female, gay or straight, White, Black, Hispanic or Asian. In God's kingdom there are no illegal aliens or undocumented workers. We who have died with Christ in baptism are resurrected to be a new people bound in love and service to one another. The Holy Spirit is given freely, without respect for citizenship or socio-economic class, and God continues today to pour out his Spirit on all humanity. The Holy

Spirit works to transform the lives of believers. Just as Jesus glorified humanity when he ascended to the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit restores our relationship with God.

May the gift of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost renew us today and stir up within us those spiritual gifts which God has so richly and freely given to us when we were baptized into Christ's holy church. May we go forth into the world, rejoicing in the transformative power of the Spirit in our lives, today and forever.

Amen