

PENTECOST SUNDAY    MAY 19, 2024

Sermon by the Reverend Martha Harris, Priest in Charge

Scripture:

Ezekiel 37: 1 - 14

Acts 2: 1 - 21

Romans 8: 22 - 27

Gospel of John: 15: 26 - 27, 16 4b- 15

Come Holy Spirit Come!

Today is a red letter day - the day when the Holy Spirit descended and landed tongues of fire on the disciples. Millenia before Google Translate, people started speaking in their native tongues and others understood them.

Thank you for wearing red today - signifying you have been touched by the Holy Spirit. Here at Saint Paul, Pentecost is a day of bitter memories. Father Patrick died suddenly and unexpectedly on Pentecost morning. Many thought this church was finished. Yet when I arrived a few months later, it didn't take me long to realize after meeting many of you, that the Holy Spirit is very much alive in your hearts and in your souls. You are a blessing to me, to Columbia and to the Episcopal Church.

Let's pause for a moment of silence to remember Father Patrick and to give thanks for all the Holy Spirit is doing within and through our congregation.

(PAUSE)

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I am honored to serve this historic church. To experience another Pentecost with you. To be reminded that the Holy Spirit is very much alive here and to continue to challenge ourselves to live more deeply into our mission as followers of Jesus Christ.

Many consider Pentecost to be the birthday of the Church. The church was formed by the Holy Spirit on this day, approximately year 30 in the Common Era - not by denominations or physical structures - but in the hearts and souls of those moved by the Holy Spirit - to speak in tongues and proclaim God's love for all. You may say it was the beginning of the Jesus movement - that Bishop Michael Curry has challenged each of us to join.

It must have been amazing - that very first Pentecost.

Have you been able to see the night sky recently?

The past few weeks there have been amazing light shows in the night sky - with solar flares transforming the Aurora Bourealis into a spectacular light show. Many of us in Lancaster County couldn't because we've been socked in by rain and clouds. Thanks to social media, we can witness God's light show as captured by photographers in the northern hemisphere.

Looking at the images as they flash across our screens, we can reflect with wonder and awe on the majesty of God's creation.

The Psalmist writes: Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the Earth. Now more than ever, we need to call on the Holy Spirit to make right all the wrongs that humans are causing - from war, to violence, to oppression and persecution, destruction of the environment, sexual assault, poverty and homelessness, to name a few.

How can we become a Church on fire with the flames of God's love and the wonder of creation to inspire us?

When the Advocate arrived, God's people were confused, chaotic, filled with uncertainty and plagued by misunderstandings between themselves. They had witnessed Christ dying on the Cross, a fortunate few may have witnessed the resurrected Christ. During the 40 days between Easter

until Ascension Day, Jesus reminded his followers of what he taught and advised that the Advocate was coming to help them.

The reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans is meant to assure God's people - and in fact all of creation that the labor pains they are experiencing will soon dissipate. They are waiting for adoption, for redemption, for a hope they cannot see.

Paul reminds us that hope that is SEEN is not Hope. "But if we hope for what we DO NOT see, we wait for it with patience." That's when we need the Holy Spirit the most - to help us during our times of weakness and self doubt. "The Holy Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

How many times have you prayed when all seemed lost, a loved one has just died, a tragic event has occurred in your life or a neighbors, and you sigh deeply because you don't have the words to pray to God.

The Advocate reassures us that God knows what is on our hearts and knows what is in the mind of the Spirit - the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to God's will.

Pentecost is considered the most important feast day in the Church, after Christmas - the birth of Christ - and Easter - the resurrection of Christ.

Today marks the end of the season that began in ashes and seeking forgiveness for our sins - Ash Wednesday - through Easter when we lit the Paschal Candle and kept lighting it through Easter Tide.

Today is also considered a baptism - into our new lives in Christ which is why we recite our Baptismal Covenant - and remember that we have been marked as Christ's own forever. In England, today is referred to as Whit(e) Sunday - when white robes are worn to signify being baptized.

Several weeks ago I preached on what Jesus means when he says "Abide in Me". Our journeys in faith with Christ are two way streets - we abide in Christ and he abides in us. That is the transformative nature of God's love for each of us.

First he sent Jesus and then the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and redeem us.

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be God's hands and feet in the world. We can testify to the love of Christ in our

lives. The church can help us to serve God - locally by restoring broken people and places to a sense of unity with God, nationally as we pray for our General Convention in Louisville in late June, and globally. We pray for the churches, synagogues and mosques in Israel and Palestine - may they find the peace that passes all understanding as they pray for an end to the bloodshed.

We have much work to be done - by working together as Christians, as people of faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, we can keep the spirit of Pentecost alive. We can find God in the midst of our daily lives - in the evening skies, in the soil where new life is bursting forth - The Spirit of Truth which descends on Pentecost continues to guide us to find meaning in the midst of our despair, to find hope in things not seen, and to find Christ in each other.

Adrienne Marie Brown captures the challenge of Pentecost as she writes: “We need movements rooted in love right now, movements powered not by difference and exclusion and punishment, but by common ground, compassion, humility, healthy boundaries, patience and healing.”

Come Holy Spirit Come.

Amen.