

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Pentecost (B) (23 May 2021)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

The Rev. Todd Foster

Time-stamp: <2021-05-22 Sat 12:47>

Collect

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-21, John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15, Psalm 104:25-35, 37

1 Beginning: Once upon a time...

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. The Church remembers this day as the occasion when Jesus' promises about the Holy Spirit were clearly and publicly fulfilled in those earliest Christians. It is an event which still resonates today, changing us and changing our lives, too.

As we discussed last week, just as St. Thomas' has prepared our graduating seniors for the changes ahead in their lives, so Jesus is preparing his *disciples* for the change that is coming. Jesus is going to die, yes, but that's OK. Because three days after his death, Jesus will be alive again. The *big change* is that Jesus will be alive in a different way, no longer bound by space and time the way most of us are, and God will soon thereafter leave off altogether visiting the disciples in the form of a man named Jesus. In his place, Jesus says, he is going to send to them the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit. This is one of those mysterious sayings in the Bible that always make me scratch my head in wonder. Why is it better for the disciples that Jesus goes away? Why does Jesus have to go in order to send the Holy Spirit? Can Jesus and the Holy Spirit not be in the same room together?

I wonder if Jesus had to go away before the disciples would be ready to *recognize* the Holy Spirit. I wonder if the physical presence of Jesus, especially the resurrected Jesus, was so powerful, so overwhelming, so awe-inspiring that there would be no space left in the disciples' attention to notice the still, small, voice of God within. Maybe Jesus had to go away not because of any limitation on Jesus' part, but a limitation on the disciples' part. Maybe Jesus had to create space for them to see this quiet, subtle, new, and even *better* thing God was doing in their lives.

Jesus' ministry and fellowship would no longer be *limited* to those who could find him wherever he happened to be at the moment. Jesus' presence would no longer be *limited* to the small clump of disciples gathered around him. Disciples of Jesus would no longer have to leave Jesus behind, be apart from his presence, when they wanted to go home and take care of their families, or go to work fishing in the sea of Galilee, or even when they went off into foreign lands to carry Jesus' message of Good News! Jesus was going to make it so that *all* of his followers, even as we came to number in the millions and to be spread around the globe, *all* Jesus' followers could enjoy the *fellowship* of God continually and see the *works* of God manifest daily in our lives no matter where we were.

Jesus left and sent the Holy Spirit so that he could be closer with *all* his disciples, no matter how numerous we would come to be. Jesus wasn't tired of being with the disciples and needing a vacation. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit so that, no matter where and when you lived, Jesus could be present and vital in *your* life.

2 The work of the Holy Spirit

What does the Holy Spirit do in our lives? Jesus explained that, too! Jesus said the Holy Spirit enters into a person, any person in the world, and convinces or even convicts that person of *three* things. The Holy Spirit convicts a person of *Sin*. And while sometimes we think of Sin as encompassing all sorts of mistakes and transgressions, there's really only one fundamental Sin that the Holy Spirit is most concerned to address. That is the Sin, the mis-alignment, the mistake, of not believing in Jesus. All the other things in your life that you might understand as sin can be problems, but chiefly they are problematic in the ways they interfere with your ability to believe in Jesus and Jesus' love for you.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit convinces a person of *righteousness*. Jesus was the only example, ever, of a truly righteous person. And the bodily example of Jesus would henceforth be absent from our sight. But the Holy Spirit would take over the job of teaching us about righteousness, about living in a way that is faithful to our citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit, deep in your heart, that does that work.

Finally, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convince us about judgment. The ruler of this world, said Jesus, has already been condemned. The things that hurt us, the forces of inequality and prejudice and violence: these have all been *condemned* by God and are already, mysteriously, passing away. When we're tempted to feel overwhelmed by the latest tragedy in the Middle East or the most recent paroxysm of insanity here in our own country... When we're troubled by broken relationships in our own families or beaten down by unfair policies in our workplace, our healthcare providers, or our church. In the midst of every expression of injustice and wrong, the Holy Spirit is here to remind us that God knows. God is aware. God has already condemned those things which hurt us and hurt our neighbors, and those injustices will be brought to an end by God's own strong arm of compassion.

3 Finishing Jesus' Work

Jesus told his disciples he had a lot more he wanted to say to them. But they just weren't ready for it yet. Instead, the Holy Spirit would continue the teaching ministry of Jesus and lead them into the truths of God's Kingdom.

My friends, the Holy Spirit is still finishing up the work of Jesus today in you and me, in our church, and in the world around us. It is better for you that Jesus be present in the Spirit, so that Jesus can travel with you wherever you go, without having to leave me or anyone else alone even for a moment. God, through the Holy Spirit, is completing the work of Jesus in you and me through that Holy Spirit that was given to us in baptism.

We live in the season of Pentecost, even when we are celebrating Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, or Easter. The Holy Spirit has come and we are recipients of that advocate, that encourager, that Spirit of truth. Like our church bell, the Holy Spirit rings out from St. Thomas' to bring Good News to everyone around us. Today the Holy Spirit is changing lives, and those changes begin with God's Holy Spirit at work in you and in me. **Amen.**