

Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Acts 2:1-11

"Birthday of the Church"

Today we remember the Apostles – who on the first Day of Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and were blessed with a special boldness to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world, and were prepared to lay down their lives, so that the faith that they received directly from Jesus and the Holy Spirit could be passed on. We are very grateful for them as we celebrate this Feast of Pentecost and the deliverance of the Holy Spirit.

The Feast of Pentecost is actually called Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks. It is an agricultural festival of the wheat harvest, which is a feast called by God in Exodus 34:22, in which God said to Moses, *"Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year."* They had to count seven weeks from Passover, forty-nine days, and they hold the celebration on the next day – the fiftieth day after Passover. This feast recalls the Exodus from Egypt when God fulfilled His promises to Abraham by rescuing his people. Passover was the time when the lambs were sacrificed, were placed upon the doorposts by hyssop branches, and the Israelites were saved, by the blood of the lamb, as the Angel of Death passed over those homes, but He killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Israelites fled Egypt that night, passing right through the Red Sea, into the Sinai desert. Fifty days after the Exodus of Passover, the Israelites came to a place called Mount Sinai, where Moses was given the law by Almighty God, the ten commandments. Pentecost – or fifty days, is about God giving to His redeemed people the way through which they are now to carry out His purposes. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up the mountain, and he came down with the Law on two stone tablets.

The Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost happens as the direct result of the ascension of Jesus to His Father. Jesus told them in Acts 1, being the Lord of all, that His power is available through the Holy Spirit to all who call on Him, all who follow Him, and all who trust in Him.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised the Apostles that the Holy Spirit was coming on them, as they were standing on the Mount of Olives, as He said, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Jesus then ascended to the Father right from that place. They saw Him go into the clouds and then they were met by two angels who told them that Jesus would return the way He left. This was eight days before Pentecost. In Acts 1:12-14, Luke wrote this: *"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."* This very same upper room was the room where they had their Passover Seder meal – the Last Supper - with Jesus on the night that He was arrested. On the feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost - they were again in that room. The experience

of the rushing wind through that house with a great roar, and the tongues of fire coming to rest on each person present, must have been both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. The word for Spirit is “*Ruach*”, which means wind or breath. Unless you are in a very cold place – you cannot see your breath, or large refrigerator – or a cold day in January or February – you might see your breath. People have said that they cannot see the Holy Spirit – but they cannot see the wind either. You can see the effects of the wind; you can see the trees start to sway, and trees and the flowers waver, you can see the effects of your breath, and just the same, I believe that you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit! Jesus, in today’s Holy Gospel told His disciples on that Thursday evening, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”* (John 14:15-17)

You know, there are people who sometimes feel guilty if they think they haven’t had some of the wonderful experiences the apostles had on that Pentecost or maybe they feel jealous of others who have had things like this happen to them. Let me remind you that God moves mysteriously among His people, dealing with each person individually in a different way. How many of you are righthanded? How many of you are lefthanded? We have a larger number of righthanded. Does that makes you a bad person? No, it makes you different. God made everyone’s fingerprints unique, just as our identities are unique. Scripture tells us that God even knows the number of hairs on your head – or the lack of them. Each one of us has a very personal relationship with God. He desires to give the Holy Spirit to people, and all we have to do is ask. What the Holy Spirit will do when He comes is anybody’s guess. We don’t limit God to what He can or will do – we certainly don’t dictate to Him and say “God – do this!” We have to let God be God! In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 – Paul writes about some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on believers. We should never doubt that God will give His Holy Spirit to all who seek Him, and that the form and direction that the Holy Spirit takes will be to enable that person to bring glory to God.

It is so amazing that on that day of Pentecost nobody needed translators! They did not have iPhone which would let them record and playback a translation – or even google translate which works pretty well. People from all over understood what the Apostles were saying in their own language. This morning, Beverly read a list of places that the people came from. That was to show you some of the places that these people came from. That was the last thing that they were expecting – they heard what was being said in their own native language. All around the Mediterranean world, everybody’s second language was Greek. Since Alexander the Great, 400 years earlier, Greek had been the written language of that world. In seminary I learned that the New Testament was written entirely in koine Greek. People in Jerusalem spoke Aramaic, and some spoke Latin because of Roman influence. Jews in Judea would speak Aramaic. On that day of Pentecost, when the disciples were speaking in tongues they heard what was being said in their own language. That was quite a miracle. They didn’t have to try and understand what they were hearing, with no need for translation. It was all supernaturally done for them! This amazing miracle of not only hearing, but understanding what the Apostles

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were saying was God's fulfilling His promise to extend His kingdom – outside of Jerusalem, *“to Judea, Samaria and to all the ends of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8) This was how God was going to fulfil what He had said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, *“In you, and in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* It isn't a national thing, folks. It is a family thing. If we believe in Jesus Christ - then we are grafted into the family of Abraham. The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 11, says that we as believers are grafted in.

Luke, in Acts chapter 2, lists where the many people on the Day of Pentecost came from, covering tens of thousands of square miles, from Parthia and Mesopotamia in the north and east - to Rome in the west and Egypt and Arabia in the south, including the island of Crete. The point is not to give an exact list of precisely where everyone came from in the crowded city of Jerusalem that day, but to show the sense of the large “melting pot” of all who are hearing words spoken in their very own language. It must have sounded like the slurred and babbling speech of people who have had too much to drink. As a matter of fact, when Peter addressed the crowd in Acts 2:15 He said, *“These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!”* This day was the turning point for the church – and is considered the birthday of the Church.

God sent His Holy Spirit to transform and to strengthen His leaders, to preach about Jesus and to change lives – eternal lives! That day, Acts 2:41-42 tells us, *“those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* These men would be changed forever, and they would no longer be hiding in the upper room but would be doing what Christ told them to do, and would now truly be Fishers of Mankind! The apostles were emboldened and received just what they needed to fearlessly share the Gospel throughout the world. When I think about the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they were given the strength to make their decision to stand with Jesus. I am reminded, and I pray that you will be today as well, of the words from Joshua 24:15 *“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”* Let us celebrate the Birthday of the Church.