

Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Acts 2:1-11

***“Transforming Power”***

The enemy loves to mess with our electronics! Marilyn and I went down to Jacksonville on Friday. A friend of ours name Paul Wilbur, a recording artist, was having a release date for his new album, CD and DVD that was recorded in Israel last year. At celebration Church, they had this great big celebration, and the band was coming out to play. Everything was great at rehearsal, but when they went to play – half of the equipment wouldn't work. They had this beautiful video which was coming on and it was amazing. The evening was about Shavuot, Pentecost and God's Holy Spirit. They went to play and there was nothing there. So, the lights went back up, Paul preached for a few minutes while they scrambled and got everything working. The enemy loves to mess with us. I don't even want to pay him any matter by saying his name – I will just say that this morning – he was at work again. Our microphone system started going south. If you noticed before the service, we were busy running around, and I had the deacon trying his mic, and Wesley was at the other mic trying to do a test. We have a sound board in the back, and it usually is perfect. I usually bring my iPad to make any adjustments, but since it has been working so well I didn't bring it. Thank the Lord, my phone has the same software. During the first reading, I went to my office and got my phone and started making adjustments. It may have gotten a little louder, then softer, but I was able to fine tune it. The Lord reigns supreme and the enemy knows that he loses big time and will continue to lose in this place because we stand on the truth and the Word of God.

Besides thanking God for our wonderful sound system, today we remember the Apostles – who on the Day of Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and were blessed with a boldness to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world – and actually would lay down their lives without hesitation – so that the faith that they received directly from Jesus and the Holy Spirit could and would be passed on. How grateful we are for them as we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost and the deliverance of the Holy Spirit.

Some background on the feast that was called Shavuot – or the Festival of Weeks: this was an agricultural festival of the harvest of wheat, but it was even more importantly an ordained feast – called by God to Moses in Exodus 34:22 *“Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year.”* They were to count seven weeks from Passover. Seven days a week, and seven weeks – that is forty-nine days – and they hold the celebration on the next day – the fiftieth day after Passover. This feast also recalls the story of the Exodus from Egypt, when God fulfilled his promises to Abraham by rescuing his people. Passover was the time when the lambs were sacrificed, and the Israelites were saved, by the blood of the lamb, and the Angel of Death passed over those homes, but killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Israelites fled Egypt that night, passing through the Red Sea into the Sinai desert. So what has this got to do with Pentecost? Fifty days after the Exodus of Passover, the Israelites came to 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 of life through which they are now to carry out His purposes. When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up the mountain, and then came down with the Law.

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

Where did this remarkable event of the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles take place? We only need to look at the chapter right before this account of Acts chapter 2. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised the Apostles what was coming for them, as they were standing the Mount of Olives - *"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 and went to the Father from that place - where they saw Him go into the clouds and they were met by two angels who told them Jesus would return the way He left. This was just 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 same upper room was the room where they had their Passover Seder meal with Jesus on the night He was arrested. On the feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost - they were again in that room. The experience of the wind rushing 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. You need to know that the word for Spirit is *"Ruach"*, which means wind or breath. Unless you are up in Buffalo New York - you cannot see your breath - or if you are in a really cold place you can see your breath. You say you cannot see the Holy Spirit - but you cannot see the wind either. You say you can see the effects of the wind; you can see the trees start to bow, and trees and the flowers waver, the effects of your breath, and I say 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) The world is stuck on seeing is believing, rather than believing is seeing!

You know, there are people who sometimes feel guilty if they think they haven't had such wonderful experiences as the apostles had on that Pentecost or maybe they feel jealous of others who seem to 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? Does that makes us bad? No, it makes us different. Does anyone here have the same fingerprints? IF you do - then your iPhone is not secure! God made it so that everyone's fingerprints are unique. Our identities are unique. Scripture tells us that God even knows the number of hairs on our head -

or the lack of them. Each one of our relationships with God is very personal. God longs 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 do or will do – we certainly don't dictate to Him and say "God – do this!" We have to let God be God! Beverly read for us today from 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 do one thing – and that is to bring glory to God.

Isn't it amazing that on that day of Pentecost, no one needed translators! Everybody understood what the Apostles were saying in their own language. That was certainly not what they were expecting! At that time, 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. People in Jerusalem spoke Aramaic, and some spoke Latin. Kind of Amazing. Jews in Judea would speak Aramaic. Travelers, like the people in this Bible account from Acts chapter 2 seem to have done, coming from Cappadocia, Phrygia, would be able to get by in Greek, and they probably spoke at least one other language. On that day of Pentecost, when the people were speaking in tongues no one needed to switch languages, they heard what was being said in their language. That was a miracle. That day they didn't have to try and understand what they were hearing, it was right what they were expecting -with no need for translation. It was all supernaturally done for them!

People are often surprised by this taking place. Many, in churches, have seen 'the gift of tongues' not as the gift of being able to speak other specific languages, but rather as the having a kind of heavenly babble, that may or may not sound like a language. For many devout Christians who happen to 'speak in tongues' as part of their prayer language, there is no expectation that anyone will 'understand' what they are saying. I am not going to ask who has the gift of tongues, or who has the gift of interpretation, but you may the gift. You may in your prayer time be able to speak in a language and you don't understand a word that you are saying. Do not be afraid of it. God knows everything that is said. This amazing miracle of not only hearing, but understanding what the Apostles 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.'* This 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. Just look in your Bible to Romans 11 and you will see that we as believers are grafted in – and the promise that was made in Genesis 12 to Abraham comes directly after the people of Babel built a tower to reach heaven, arrogantly trying to make a name for themselves and what was God's response? God confused their languages so that they could no longer understand each other. Here is God opening up His kingdom to people of others tongues and nations. He showed that one God can speak to all!

Luke, in Acts, lists where these 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 exactly where everyone came from in the crowded city of Jerusalem that day, but to show the sense of a 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, in turn change lives – eternal lives! That day, as 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.”* That is why we call Pentecost the “birthday” of the church. These men would be changed forever – 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. They experienced something like when Elijah addressed Israel from Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18:21 – *“Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”* So I ask you today, how long are you going to waver between two opinions; if you believe what this person is saying, or what that person is saying, you are watching this news, or that news. There is one truth. Believe in God, rather than what you are hearing from other people. When I hear those words from Elijah, and I think about the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit were given the strength to make their decision to stand with Jesus. I am reminded, personally and I pray that you will too today, of the words from Joshua 24:15 *“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles can give us insight to the Apostles works and their ministries. Traditions give us some further information about the lives of some of the Apostles. Peter went to Caesarea, Antioch and more – finally being crucified upside down in the circus of Nero in Rome around 64 AD. Our Patron Saint Andrew, Peter’s brother, was an apostle to the Greeks. He also was crucified on a cross in the shape of an X, and that is why the banner or shield of St. Andrew is an X. John, who wrote the Gospel, the Epistles of John, and the Book of Revelation, was not martyred - in spite of the Romans trying, was exiled to the Island of Patmos, where he wrote the “Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John.” He died around 100 AD and is buried in Ephesus. The other Apostles are all said to have given their lives while spreading the Gospel of truth and love about Jesus of Nazareth.

You cannot deny the transformation that took place in the lives of the Apostles, as well as those present in that upper room, on that Feast of Shavuot, by the Holy Spirit, that Day of Pentecost. How else can you explain how these men went from hiding *“for fear of the Jews”* (John 20:19) to people who truly and passionately brought the truth about Jesus to the world? We are

Pentecost Sunday, June 9, 2019, Year C

evidence of that today. And so on this Day of Pentecost, the Feast of Shavuot – let us be bold to celebrate the Holy Spirit and gratefully worship our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, our Messiah.