

Day of Pentecost, May 20, 2018, Year B

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Acts 2:1-11

***"Fruit That Will Last"***

Today on this special day, all of our readings – the second chapter of Acts, Psalm 104, 1 Corinthians 12, and the Gospel of John chapter 20 – are living reminders of the power and the work of God's Holy Spirit. Today, the church celebrates the Holy Spirit and His work in beginning God's one, holy and apostolic church. Did you notice that I left out the word "catholic?" A lot of people cringe when they hear the word "catholic" – it is always in the 'little c' because it means 'universal' – and that is what God wants. He wants the same – one Lord, one faith, one baptism to ring true in Christianity. It doesn't matter what flavor! What matters is what is at the center of it. All ice creams have cream – and all Christians should have Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father. Many call this day the birthday of the church. How ironic it is that 5 years ago, on the Day of Pentecost, St. Andrew's Anglican Church came into being – standing on God's Holy Word and leaving behind so much – to honor God and to obey His Holy Word. Pentecost 2013 is the birthday of THIS church.

What else is special about Pentecost? Pentecost was really an agricultural festival, known as the "Feast of Weeks" or in Hebrew "Shavuot" that took place 50 days after Passover. For the Jew, neither Passover nor Pentecost were simply agricultural festivals, because they were reminders of the great story of the Exodus from Egypt, when God fulfilled His promises to Abraham rescuing His people, through Moishe. Moishe? That was his name - Moses.

At the first Passover, Israelites were saved from 'the angel of death' by the 'Blood of the Lamb' – and they escaped Egypt to head toward the Promised Land. Fifty days after Passover, they were led by God Himself to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Law from God Himself. Pentecost, the fiftieth day, is really about God giving to His people the way of life by which they must now live – the Law. None of this happened by accident for God had mapped out, even to the day, what He wanted His people to know about and to recall.

The final words that Jesus spoke just before ascending to the Father from the Mount of Olives are very important promises. He said, "*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.*" (Acts 1:8) That means Coffee County, Douglas and even Ambrose! All the ends of the earth. The Day of Pentecost, just seven days after Jesus' Ascension, is the day when Jesus' promise is fulfilled and as we read in the Second Chapter of Acts - the Apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit, with tongues of fire, empowering and emboldening them for the work of ministry. Funny how they went from hiding to proclaiming.

Jesus promised them power. The Greek word for power is **δύναμις** (dunamis) which we get the words dynamic, dynamo and dynamite from – strong power – and the wind that blew upon the Apostles was not a gentle breeze but as the reading from Acts 2 said it was "*a violent wind,*" this was a powerful wind - "*a mighty, rushing wind*" – we are talking about real "power." The Apostles were given power from the Holy Spirit and fire! A refiner's fire!

When we speak of the Holy Spirit, we aren't speaking about merely 'a force' or 'some divine energy'; we are speaking about a Person; the third Person of the Trinity. Jesus said, on the night before He died, that "*when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*" (John 16:13) Notice that Jesus didn't say, "it" but "He." In the Book of Acts when the Apostle Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit, he uses a personal pronoun. Because the Holy Spirit is a Person and the Holy Spirit is God. That's why Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. You can't grieve a force or an energy source, but you can grieve a person!

Jesus answered Nicodemus' question about how he could be 'born again' in John 3:5-7 saying: "*I tell you the truth; no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'*" When you come to Christ, there must be a spiritual rebirth! You have had a spiritual rebirth if you recognize and follow Jesus Christ as your Lord.

In Galatians 5:22-23 the Apostle Paul wrote, "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (which means patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*" These are the Fruit of the Spirit. Jesus told His disciples, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.*" (John 15:16) If you are being led by the Holy Spirit – then these will be true of your life.

Those images of a violent wind and fire are an amazing view of God's power being given to believers of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word for wind is 'Ruach', 'Ruach' is also the word for Spirit. The Holy Wind, the Holy Spirit – the "*Ruach Ha Kadesh*" brought power, confidence and boldness to these disciples, who up to this point have been denying and hiding - and they would never be the same again! Through the Holy Spirit, the power of God Himself comes, transforming the earth with the power of heaven, starting with the hearts, minds and lives of the followers of Jesus - all together in one place. The Holy Spirit comes, not to divide – but to unite. Just as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8 – the Apostles would receive power. The Holy Spirit comes, not to divide, but to unite. Those Disciples who had been hiding for 50 days – suddenly became totally different – they would leave that place and go out and they start to preach to people. A wall had been taken down that day. Peter gave an amazing message; three thousand people came to the Lord, professed themselves as believers and were baptized that day! The gift of the Holy Spirit transformed them, a small group of frightened, puzzled and largely uneducated men and women could so quickly become, as they undoubtedly did, "a force to be reckoned with" throughout the known world. You must agree with me, that was an amazing transformation!

There was also this amazing and strange phenomenon of 'speaking in tongues.' On that Day of Pentecost, no one needed translators. Jerusalem was overflowing with people from all over for the festival, speaking all sorts of languages. Everybody understood in their own language. It was all done for them by the Holy Spirit, miraculously. For many devout Christians who 'speak

in tongues' as part of their personal prayer language, they don't expect that anyone will 'understand' what is said. There are many well documented instances of people 'speaking in tongues' suddenly, by the Holy Spirit, and not knowing that there is someone present who can understand and interpret them.

Lets' face it – we are talking about God here, and God can do whatever God wants to do, He has the power; it isn't up to us to set limits on what God can do. He is reaching out when the Gospel needs to make an impact on someone, or some group of people. This phenomenon points to something else that is going on that day in Jerusalem. God was revealing how He was fulfilling what He promised to Abraham, many, many years before in Genesis 12.3: He told Abraham, *'In you, and in your family, all the families of the earth will be blessed.'* Blessed to be a blessing! This incredible promise to Abraham comes right after the incredible event in Genesis, about the people of Babel are building a tower to get to heaven, and they were arrogantly trying to make a name for themselves. God responds to their pride and arrogance by toppling their project and then He confuses their languages so that they cannot understand one another, leaving their society in shambles. On that day of Pentecost that curse of Babel was overturned; God vividly shows that His promises to Abraham are being fulfilled, and the whole human race is going to be able to hear the good news, the Gospel. The term "good news" is "εὐαγγέλιον" in Greek (euaggelion) and that is also the term for Gospel in Greek! The Gospel is being professed throughout the world, about what has happened in and through Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ – Jesus the Messiah.

People had come from all over, from Parthia and Mesopotamia in the north and east, to Rome in the west and Egypt and Arabia in the south, even with the island of Crete. That is to give us the sense of great wonder as people were hearing words spoken in their own native language, by a bunch of fishermen from Galilee. To some sounded simply like the slurred and babbling speech of people who have had too much to drink. That was pretty much what Peter said – it was too early in the day and they had not had too much to drink.

What happened that day brought about a remarkable, inexplicable display of repentance and faith, with thousands of people receiving Christ. Repentance and faith aren't just something that you do when you are saved, they are necessary each and every day if we are to be led by the Holy Spirit. Repentance is God's way of revealing "myself to me," an inner look and saying "Lord, what do we need to fix here?" "Help me, help me turn away from what I am doing, and the behavior that needs to be repaired." You can't do it alone, so you ask God's help. He always grants forgiveness. It is also God's way of revealing Himself, who He is, who Jesus Christ is to me.

- In repentance God shows me my sin;
- In faith God shows His Grace and His Glory.

You know the wonderful thing about fruit is that it is meant to be consumed. It is very pretty when you watch it growing. We have this little lemon tree that we bought which had little tiny lemons coming out. All of a sudden, a lot of them disappeared. It could have been during a rain

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storm or we might have a squirrel or birds that are taking them. They are meant to be consumed satisfying both our thirst and our hunger.

- When we say yes to the Holy Spirit,
- when we are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit,
- when we continue in repentance and faith,
- we will come to that place where we will not only be disciplined,
- but we will be satisfied.

No one is ever “more free” than the one who is living a life led by the Holy Spirit. But, it is up to each of us to take that step and receive Him into our lives. Remember what Jesus said, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.*” (John 15:16)