

Pentecost Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 31, 2020, Year A

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31 and Various

***"A United Kingdom"***

Heavenly Father, we rejoice on this day, when the Holy Spirit came and opened a new way to everlasting life. Building, guiding, teaching, protecting us, and blessing us with incredible gifts. It started with the apostles, and they went and gave to the world. Some gifts you receive and some gifts you take on – thankful that you have said yes. Bless us this day, Lord, and open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds to your Holy Word. In Jesus' precious Name, amen.

Boy, it sounds good to say, "please be seated!" You are a sight for sore eyes! Have you ever heard that before? It is so great to see you, and the others who will be coming between 12 and 1 to receive Holy Communion. We are doing all we can to make sure that our family is receiving and protected – whether it is hand sanitizer, or whether it be masks. The Lord gives us what we need. I promise we will resolve our problem with our camera and we will have HD next week. (We had a problem with our camera and my wife Marilyn is recording this on her phone.)

Our Gospel today brings us back to the Upper Room on Easter Sunday – the Risen Jesus appears to the Apostles and has some incredible gifts for them. Everybody like gifts? I like gifts! I love to receive gifts. Especially if they have a steering wheel, with a bow on it. The Lord gives the apostles on gift first – and that is His Peace, and then He tells them, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."* (John 20:21-23) When you think about it, how incredible it is that He says that He is sending them. And I have got to tell you - He is sending us as well! And God is going to forgive sins through them. They were given this authority after they are given the promise and gift – of the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathed upon the Apostles – and in doing so He 'ordained' them to be ministers of forgiveness – but they would not be fully receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit – like Paul describes in our second reading today from 1 Corinthians 12, until the Day of Pentecost, when they would be fully ordained through the Holy Spirit.

When the Apostles received the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room from Jesus – that was not in the same manner in which they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In the Upper Room Jesus gave His breath to them – His Ruach – the Hebrew word for breath or Spirit. They received it – His breath – His Spirit – enabling them to 'get out of the Upper Room' and going and doing things. Anyone have an experience of being holed up in a room or a house for a while? And then getting the freedom to get out and do things. We can remember that, and we certainly can feel what the apostles were feeling. He gave them a certain amount of power and strength – to follow Him to the Galilee – where He made them breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at a place called Tabgha, according to John 21, and asked Peter three times if he loved Jesus – undoing the three denials – and He transformed Peter from a fisherman to a shepherd. This was before Jesus ascended to the Father on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of His Resurrection. On that 40<sup>th</sup> day, before He left the Mount of Olives and went to heaven – Jesus further defined His expectations of the Apostles and told them that in just days they would receive the

full anointing of power from the Holy Spirit: *“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.”* After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” (Acts 1:8-9) Last week I said in my sermon, “welcome to the ends of the earth!” That is where we are. Right *“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”* Jesus made a lot of promises, and every one of them He kept, but this promise He made was of the Holy Spirit, who He also called the Counselor, Comforter, and Spirit of Truth – He was just days away – from that 43<sup>rd</sup> day after Passover. They just had to be patient and wait.

Pentecost is not a Christian holiday; it is a Jewish holiday. It is also known as Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks. It was the fiftieth day after Passover. It was an agricultural festival, when farmers brought the first sheaf of wheat from the crop, and offered it to God, as a sign of gratitude and as a prayer that the rest of the crop would be safely harvested. Both Passover and Pentecost brought to mind great memories of 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 people were saved by the ‘blood of the lamb. The Israelites were saved from the Angel of Death who killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. Fifty days after Passover, they came to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Law – the 10 Commandments. That became the Feast of Shavuot - the Day of Pentecost – the apostles were gathered in one place when *“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.”* (Acts 2:2) Remember what I said a few moments ago about the winds, breath or Spirit? It is important to note that breath or the spirit which like the wind is invisible, immaterial, and powerful. Speaking of the winds, breath, or Spirit – I want you to look at the Psalm 104: 29-30 from today’s Bulletin.

29 When you hide your face, they are troubled; \*

**when you take away their breath, they die, and are turned again to their dust.**

30 When you let your breath go forth, they shall be made, \*

**and you shall renew the face of the earth.**

Can you see how even the Psalmist – could see the connection with the Holy Spirit and new life. More was to happen to the Apostles that Pentecost – as they were further ordained by the Holy Spirit. *“They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”* (Acts 2:3-4) They were not just ordained that day but they were transformed – filled with gifts of the Holy Spirit and given a boldness. Do you remember that these were the men who ran when Jesus was arrested, and they hid in the Upper Room. They were given a boldness that would allow them to bear a powerful witness to the truth about Jesus and His resurrection and to 3,000 people on that very first day, as a sign that this is like the sheaf which was offered to God as the sign of the great harvest that was to come. That boldness and power that they received was especially evident and witnessed by those who heard them speaking in the languages of the many visitors that day who were in Jerusalem for

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the festival of Shavuot or Pentecost. Peter would boldly witness to the crucifixion of Jesus and proclaim that He is alive still! He is still alive today! Later in that same second chapter of Acts - Luke wrote that Peter's message was so powerful and clear that "*those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*" (Acts 2:41)

The apostles were transformed from followers into leaders of what would become 'the church.' That is why Pentecost Sunday is called 'the birthday of the Church' and that is why our church is decorated in red - and I asked you to wear red too. The power that came and comes from the Holy Spirit - the wind - the Ruach was life changing - not only for the Apostles but also for those who would hear their message about Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal life that He offers to all who will believe in Him. For each believer it becomes more important that they receive the Holy Spirit who will transform into someone whose heart is on fire with the love of God.

The creative power of God Himself, comes from heaven to earth, through the Holy Spirit, and does its work in our midst. The point is to transform the earth with the power of heaven, starting with those parts of the earth which consists of the bodies, minds, hearts, and lives of the followers of Jesus - as a community - the Body of Christ. In Acts 2:1 it says that '*they were all together in one place*'; and the Holy Spirit came to unite. The Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost fulfills Jesus' promises - and the Holy Spirit will comfort and counsel - giving us the words to speak in witness to Jesus, guiding the believers in Jesus. He gives us the words to speak when we need them - when we ask Him - so that we can speak about Jesus guiding His believers.

In closing, I want to suggest to you that the day of Pentecost marks the time when the whole body of believers in Jesus the Messiah was transformed into a 'new creation' bringing about a spiritual transformation, in which heaven and earth are joined together as one - a truly United Kingdom of God.