

## Sermon for Pentecost, June 5, 2022

The Feast of Pentecost is often called the birthday of the church. So Happy Birthday! This is the day that the church really became the church. The disciples had been a motley band of Jesus' followers, who listened to him and had trouble understanding him and often messed up. They deserted him when he died and then crept back together. They were overwhelmed with joy when he was raised from the dead and he breathed the Spirit into them. And at the Ascension, Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit to clothe them with power, when they would be his witnesses. And they waited, joyfully praising God. A band of friends and disciples, still unsure what to do or how to do it.

On the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them with power. A lot of power. Like being on fire. Like a hurricane rushing through the room. They were electrified. They were clothed with power from on high. And that day they became the church and they accepted Jesus' commission and tumbled out onto the streets of Jerusalem and started sharing the Good News that God loved them and would save whoever called on him. They became the church.

Now, they still didn't always get everything right and they still made mistakes, but they were changed. The Holy Spirit had clothed them with power from on high and they accepted the commission Jesus gave them to preach the good news and be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and to the ends of the earth. They accepted the mission that Jesus had had, accepted their role in carrying out that mission now Jesus was no longer on earth to do it. Which is exactly what it means to be the church.

Do you remember last week, I told you about God's plan to rescue us from our own worst nature? What the church calls God's plan of salvation? First God the Son became incarnate as a human being, as Jesus of Nazareth. So he joined heaven to earth, his own Divine life to our human life in the person of Jesus. Then, when Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, he took Jesus's human life back with him into the Divine life, another link between God and humanity.

The events of Pentecost are a third link, in bridging the gap between God and humans. Jesus talked about this in the gospel passage we read today. First he tells Philip and the other disciples that he and the Father are one and if you've seen Jesus, you've seen the Father. The Father dwells in him and he does the Father's will. And he promises that God will send his Spirit (who is also God) to dwell in us and be with us always and to teach us and guide us. The Spirit of God will dwell in us as she dwelt in Jesus.

St. Paul talks about this in many places in his letters. He puts it this way: he says we are the Body of Christ. In today's reading he says that if we have received the Spirit of God then we are children of God, and heirs, joint heirs with Christ. In other words, we, the church as a whole, become Christ's body here on earth. Not content with coming to share our human nature in the person of Jesus, God is now going to share our lives with us, dwell within us and walk with us throughout our whole lives. And guide us as he guided Jesus. And use us to keep reaching out to the world in love.

The church as a whole is taking over the mission of Jesus to preach good news of God's love and salvation and forgiveness and healing. We become, quite literally, Jesus' hands and feet and voice here on earth. Each of us who is baptised is part of that. That's what it means to be part of the church. We are part of Christ's body here on earth and we share in Christ's mission to make this world the way God desires it to be. That's the church universal and it's Emmanuel Church here in Spryfield. And every other church in the world and throughout history. That is our purpose. To incarnate the love of God here and now as Jesus did.

Now that's a tall order. I don't need to tell you the church has not done that perfectly throughout the years. In fact, sometimes it's messed up royally. We ourselves have not done that perfectly. The first disciples didn't do it perfectly either. But the Spirit continues to lead us and guide us and help us see our errors and hopefully not make the same ones too often again. Just as Jesus forgave the disciples for abandoning him and so on, he forgives us when we mess up and helps us carry on and try to do better, and make amends if necessary. Which is very good news.

Today we are baptising Rebecca Baker into the Body of Christ. Her parents and godparents will make some promises on her behalf today, and on their own behalf, and we also get a chance to renew our own baptismal covenant. We will promise to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. That means we will keep coming to church, keep taking communion, keep studying the Bible and the teachings of the church and keep praying.

We will promise to persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin to repent and return to the Lord. Mostly the evil we need to resist will be within ourselves, the desires and impulses that go against what Jesus has taught us. Plus the pressures of society to do things contrary to the teachings of Jesus. And we will not always succeed. That's why it says, "whenever" we fall into sin. Because we will. But when we do, we promise to repent and return to God.

We will promise to proclaim by word and example (both!) the good news of God in Christ. That's the mission Jesus entrusted to his church. That's our mission. Not just ordained people but all of us. Not to stand on a street corner on a soap box but in our daily lives to live and speak in such a way that we do these things. Tell people we have faith and what it is and why. And then live it out, and invite them, respectfully, to come and see what it's about.

We will promise to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves. Because Christ does dwell in all persons and if we learn to see him there, we can learn to love them. And we all know people who don't make this easy. But with the help of God, we keep working on this.

We will promise to strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being. Actively work towards it. Become a peacemaker, become a person who cares

deeply about justice and doesn't just stand by and watch injustice. Treat every person with dignity, as if they were deeply loved by God. Because they are.

We will promise to strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth. This might mean making some changes in our lifestyles. Using fewer resources, recycling, maybe writing letters to our government to protect the environment. Actively working for the good of the earth God has made.

Lisa and Scott and Rebecca's godparents will make these promises on their own behalf and on behalf of Rebecca. We make them on our own behalf as well. And in so doing, we are committing ourselves to be part of the Christ's church, Christ's Body here on earth and to accept and take up Jesus' mission. And for his part, God commits Godself to filling us with the Spirit and helping us along, because we can't do it without God's help. And because this is God's work and God is inviting us to share it.

This will look a bit different for each of us. I think of Kathy Melvin, whose funeral we had on Friday. She liked to do things behind the scenes. She sent hundreds of cards to people every year. She sent cards to all the people she prepared for baptism, for a good 5 years afterwards. Marie Collins, whose funeral I led a couple weeks ago, was also a behind the scenes person. She raised a large family, alone after her husband died, and made her home a place of peace, where everyone was welcome.

Some of the ordinary saints of the church put on a Spring Fling yesterday, where we had an enjoyable time working together, putting things out for reuse instead of throwing them away, welcoming the neighbourhood, and raised some money for our church. Earlier this week some of the saints of this church spent a couple mornings feeding the hungry at our food bank, and treating our clients with respect, lovingly. We even welcomed some Ukrainian refugees.

Other people, like St. Peter, tend to be in the limelight. He took the lead in preaching and interpreting the Scriptures in the light of what had just happened to them, with the coming of the Holy Spirit. I tend to be more of a centre stage person, in a leadership role. Our choir and organist offer music and praise to God to uplift our spirits. We all have different gifts, and they are all needed as we work for the same thing: to carry out Jesus' mission here on earth, to make this world like the Kingdom of God. We are all already doing this. Today we promise to keep doing and to see where we may be falling short and work on those things, and we give thanks for God's empowering Spirit.

We don't know yet what Rebecca's gifts will be or how she will serve God. But today, in faith, we are joining her to Christ's Body and God is filling her with his Spirit. For her this is a promise of things to come. A promise that the church will be here for her. That we will pray for her and accept her as one of ourselves. That we will teach her and love her and support her in her life in Christ.

I asked you last week to pray for a fresh outpouring of God's Holy Spirit upon us today, and in the days to come. I asked you to pray that God will show us how we should go

forward in this time of change and then give us the love and courage we need to do it, that God's Spirit will empower us as God empowered the early church. And may we be as faithful as they were, keeping our baptismal promises, and being his witnesses in Spryfield and all Nova Scotia and to the ends of the earth.