

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2010
PENTECOST/CHILDREN'S SUNDAY

Scriptures: Psalm 104:24-35; Acts 2:1-8; John 14: 15-27; Romans 8:15-17

A REALLY GREAT STORY

I love the church of Jesus Christ, I really do! It has been my home all my life. And I am so privileged to be able to say that there is no time in my life when church was not important— even when we first moved to Michigan 30 years ago, and I missed my old church and old church friends— even when it was hard for us to find the right church in our new home. Being part of a church and serving in a church have always been important to me and always will be. I remember going to Vacation Bible School as a little girl, and as a young person in Pilgrim Fellowship helping to cook the Easter breakfast after the Sunrise Service each year, and singing in the church choir when I was in high school. As a lay woman I taught Bible studies, taught Sunday School, was President of Women's Fellowship, sang in the choir, taught homemaking skills to poor women, attended Association meetings, served on the Board of Diaconate, worked in the kitchen, wrote for the church newsletter, and just about anything that needed doing. Serving God through my church was just my love! When I am really old, I hope that there will be some new and wonderful ways that I can still serve my church.

During the years I have known many kinds of people in various churches. I could tell you so many stories about Christian characters I have known, but then, you have your own stories because many of you have been down a similar road. In this church I have heard the stories of such illustrious people as Dr. Robinson, Judge Pugsley, Elmo Nobles, Dr. Stevens, Pearl Peacock and Harriet Rollins. There is the heart-rending story of the little girl from our Sunday School back in the days when the church building was being planned and built who lay dying, and asked that all the money in her piggy bank be given to the work of the church. The church is a truly strange institution if you think about it. Where else do you find a group of people with a

common purpose and common belief who are all so different? There are churches whose membership includes babies and the very elderly, the very wealthy and the very poor, those with good health and a lot of energy, and those who are chronically ill, shut-in at home or in nursing homes. There are people with multiple degrees and people who have not finished high school, and there are those who work for minimum wage while others hold professional jobs. What in the world lets us be together in the church in a peaceful relationship?

I probably should say that the relationships are not always peaceful. Some churches have constant bickering, people leaving and coming back, gossiping, back biting, attacking the pastor and so on. In spite of these things which do happen, in dysfunctional churches, the church of Jesus Christ goes on, and I believe it will endure forever. Why? How do we remain the Body of Christ, a body which includes all those people I have mentioned all coming from various confessional backgrounds—Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Reformed, Lutherans, Amish, Dunkards, Mennonites, and even we who are out of the Congregational heritage. What makes it possible for the Church to stay the Church.

It all begins with the most wonderful story, a really great story! It happened on one of the Jewish feast days; Pentecost was the Greek name for that festival. It was after the Resurrection and after the Ascension of Jesus back to heaven. The believers were all gathered together. They were sad, they missed Jesus, their friend and Savior; and they were afraid and uncertain about what to do next. They were together for moral support, kind of like what we do after a loved one dies and everyone gets together after the service to eat and talk and remember, and to help each other in their grief.

Suddenly, there was a sound like the violent blowing of the wind. It came down

from heaven and it filled the whole place. Then, they all saw what appeared to be tongues of fire coming down and settling on each one of them— and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit moved them to speak. Think of the sound that must have made. Think of goose bumps going up and down your arms, and the hairs on your neck standing up! Think of seeing those tongues of fire over the heads of those around you and knowing that they were on your head as well because you could feel the Spirit filling you.

The Holy Spirit is a mystery like so many things in our faith. We cannot see it or taste it or hear it or smell it or touch it. Yet, when we believe in Jesus as our Savior and trust Him with our lives, He gives us his Spirit to indwell us and to bring us help and guidance, comfort and peace. The Bible tells us that the Spirit even helps us to pray when we do not know how to pray for ourselves. Romans 8:26 says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” The Holy Spirit knows our weaknesses and seeks to help us to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

The disciples, and all those who came to believe what they taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, were empowered to do what they never could have done before. Men and women who were ordinary people like you and I, like people in any church, were able to go out and preach the gospel all over the known world. In spite of persecution and terrible living conditions they were able to built the church from the bottom up. In places far from Jerusalem churches sprang up in houses and even in meeting places by the sides of rivers or in caves. When people heard that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Savior of the world, their hearts were changed and they longed for the fellowship of other believers with whom they could share scriptures, hear the Word preached, sing praises and pray together. They met to worship, to share meals, and

to partake of the meal of Communion celebrating the death and Resurrection of Jesus. The rejoiced when new believers joined their groups and baptism was a highlight of any worship service.

The disciples who gathered that day in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost were full of the Spirit, and they must have been changed in a way that was apparent to all who watched. But they were not drunk, not high on some mind-altering drug. They were high on God, high on the presence of the spirit of Christ within them. That is a heady experience! Peter stood up and explained everything to the crowd in his great Pentecost sermon. He said that it was all exactly as the prophet Joel had said it would be. God would pour out his spirit on all people. “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.” And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Pentecost power was a mighty thing borne on a mighty wind and shown in flames of fire. The results of the giving of the Holy Spirit have been great, in fact there are no words to describe.

My friends if you are a Christian there is no reason for you to ever think that you are without resources, without help, without power. You have the Holy Spirit of God living within you! If you are a Christian you are a child of the Living God. Hear again the words from Romans; “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of son-ship And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with your spirit that you are God's children.” You can cry out to God in your need as if you were little children crying out to your earthly fathers—“Daddy, help me!” You are not to live in fear because the very spirit of God is with you and in you.

Being indwelt with the Holy Spirit means that there will be evidence in your life. Not only will you be able to find courage in the midst of fear, but you will display

special qualities. Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." You might feel that you are lacking in some of those areas, perhaps you have a problem with patience or self-control. The very idea that you are aware of your shortcomings means that you are being convicted by the Spirit of your need to turn away from sin, ask forgiveness, and become obedient to God once again. When you decide in your heart to do what is right the Holy Spirit will help you.

Jesus himself foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit. In John 7 Jesus said, "'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." When you yearn for righteousness, yearn for something different from what the world has to offer, when you are thirsty for God, that is when you need living water. When you believe in Him it is as if He gives you living water to drink. That water of life is in truth the Holy Spirit which will come flowing out of you. It is what gives you the ability to reach out to someone who needs to experience the Christ, and in your touch, in your smile of welcome will be the presence of the Holy Spirit. And others will be affected by who you are. They may reject you or they may respond to you in excitement and joy. But the work of the Spirit will go on and on. It is how the Church lives and grows, and it is how its people live and grow. We are here in this time and place for a reason, a purpose. We are called by God, and we must answer.

As we celebrate on this great day, think of our 2000 year history, think of all who have preached the Word, given the money, taught the kids, sat with the sick and dying, grieved with the sorrowing, cut the grass, trimmed the bushes, sang in the choir, washed the dishes, fed the hungry, supported the missions. Then think of where you are in the history of the church of Jesus Christ. How are you continuing in the line of

the faithful? How are you living in the Spirit? Are you living in the way which Paul described in his letter to Timothy? “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” With the Holy Spirit we can do mighty deeds for God, not timidly, but with power and love and self-discipline! We can be the Church!

Let us pray: “Holy and Mighty God, fill us again with your Spirit, empower us with your loving presence, and gird us with knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.