

Sermon for 15.5.16 Pentecost.

Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, the fulfilment of Jesus promise to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in his disciples. God is within us.

In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is a salvation event of the highest importance, for it is the actual turning point at which the true Israel begins to separate itself from unbelievers, to become the church.

Many understand this festival as the birth date of the church.

The feast of Pentecost originated as the Jewish festival, "The feast of weeks" and was originally associated with the Promised Land and later with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, the covenant.

The events recorded in Acts 2 reflect the historic traditions of Pentecost.

The resemblance of the visible gift of the Spirit in the form of tongues of fire - God's Holy Spirit poured out for all, recalls the descent of the Law in fire on Sinai; and the gift of languages given to the disciples, marks the reversal of the scattering of nations at Babel.

The feast of Pentecost brings the Easter season to a close and there is a visual change in our worship service. The liturgical colour changes from white, which is traditionally the symbol of purity and joy - and we have worn white throughout the Easter season - to red, a colour that reminds us of the fire- like divided tongues that landed on the disciples during that first Pentecost event.

Tomorrow, immediately following today's festival, the liturgical colour will change to green, the colour which symbolizes the sacred yet ordinary season of the church calendar.

The colour green symbolises healthy growth and we might say that tomorrow, after all the celebration, we continue growing into our true self in the Holy Spirit.

During the week I was reflecting on the meaning of Pentecost and more specifically about the personal nature of God. I felt the wonder of God's loving presence and I also had a sense of how such an all knowing personal presence can, for some of us, be quite a challenge, perhaps even a threat.

When we understand the fullness of the Christian God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is the divine active energy of the Holy Spirit that is constantly in our lives, ready to lead us into all truth - and the truth that he takes us to first as I have found on my own journey is our very own.

The Holy Spirit can take us to our inner places that we may not want to visit.

Those places that have a permanent "do not disturb" sign hanging out front.

Over time we have heard that the Holy Spirit is our counsellor, helper, strengthener supporter, adviser, advocate and ally – yet all of these roles are indisputably personal, and while these descriptive words are meant to encourage us, I think for some of us they can add to our fear.

I remember a Seinfeld episode once when Gerry Seinfeld was discussing with his friends the book called *The Road Less Travelled* by Scott Peck.

The book is largely about the journey into the self with a dedication to truth and responsibility.

After reading the book Gerry's comment to his friends was "Well if you ask me there is a very good reason that this road is less travelled."

I think Phillip in our gospel reading this morning shared the same view.

Phillip didn't really want to face truth. His way of dodging it was to seek more proof. "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied" he says to Jesus.

In response Jesus words are filled with an incredulous disbelief "have I been with you all this time and you still do not know me"?

"Believe me that I am in the father and the father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves."

In this encounter with Jesus, Phillip, faced with indisputable evidence, revealed a stubbornness that allowed him to remain where he wanted to remain - in his comfort zone.

Accepting that in Jesus he was experiencing an encounter with God was just too confrontational, too much of a challenge. If he accepted it, everything would change for him.

I believe the story of Phillip in today's passage, points to the very reason we need the Holy Spirit as the breathe of new life constantly within us.

Sometimes we need to be rescued from ourselves -from our ways that do not want to be disturbed and from those ways that fester in our unconscious that we are unaware of - yet have an effect on our attitudes and outward behaviour.

The Holy Spirit does call us into challenging territory, yet the Holy Spirit looks upon us and calls us not with judgement or disdain or disgust, but with the only way he knows – with all powerful divine love.

For only love can permeate, overcome and free us.

In love the divine Spirit calls, comforts, counsels, strengthens and advises us to open our eyes to self-acceptance, self-forgiveness, integration and transformation that ultimately reveals our true selves as people who can do greater works by remaining in the world as witnesses to the way of God in Jesus Christ.

Such an understanding gives renewed meaning to the words from Paul in his letter to the Romans:

”For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father! It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be gloried with him.”

This is the work of the Holy Spirit poured out upon you.

You see him and know him because he abides with you, and he is in you.

The Lord be with you.

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