

June 4 – Pentecost Sunday
The Rite of Confirmation & Communion
“Inspired”
Rev. Dr. Scott Landis
John 20:19-23

We typically read from the second chapter of Acts on Pentecost Sunday, recalling the way the Holy Spirit blew through and among the gathered crowd, “like the rush of a mighty wind,” and how “tongues as of fire alit upon their heads as they spoke in languages for which they had no knowledge.” Acts, chapter 2, is the go-to reading for this day as it describes the “Birthday of the Church” since it states that nearly 3,000 were added to their number on that day. That’s all well and good, but I am drawn to John’s version of the Pentecost that describes a very different setting and a completely different timeframe.

John’s story takes us all the way back to Easter evening. Jesus had risen from the dead – or, at least, they knew he was no longer in the tomb where he was buried. His disciples were hiding behind locked doors out of fear and were beside themselves with grief. It’s there that Jesus enters and greets them with peace. “Peace to you,” he says.

That, by the way, is the very reason why we offer “peace” to one another each Sunday as a liturgical act of worship. It’s not a time to catch up or engage in small talk. By doing this we remember the first words of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection. “Peace be with you.” And we respond, “And also with you.”

And then, as the story goes, he took a deep breath and breathed INTO them – he “inspired” them as the life giving Holy Spirit filled their bodies and they were empowered to serve – a sense of vitality was bestowed upon them that had its basis in forgiveness. Jesus challenged, “If you forgive someone’s sins, they’re gone for good. If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?”

Imagine that – inspired service based in forgiveness. It runs counter to what most of us have been taught. We’d rather get even. We want to see justice on our terms. We want things to work out the way we think is right. But that’s not necessarily the Jesus’ way.

I read this week of a woman in a church back east. She was one of those “saints of the church,” staying up late laying plans for a sister church in Cuba, arising early to bake bread to give out to homeless persons in need. She constantly engaged her life in acts of service that she felt deeply called to do. At one point her pastor detected a sense of grief she was carrying and inquired about what he suspected. It was then that she described daily visits to her father who lay dying in a nearby hospital.

Angry at God for this perceived injustice in her life, she described the process she invented to survive her father’s imminent death. Day after day, in the same parking space, she sat in her car with her hands on the steering wheel. Each time she inhaled she said, “God’s peace”; each time she exhaled, “God’s presence.” She said she waited there until “something in me changed.” She may not have been able to put it in words

but what was happening is she was receiving the presence of the Holy Spirit to guard her breaking heart and to guide her practice of faith.¹

She was learning what it meant to let go – not only of her father – but of that which separated her from God – which is the very definition of sin. She needed to be “inspired”: God’s Presence – God’s Peace, in order to do the work of attending to and finally letting go of her father, and, in the process, she drew ever closer to God.

Pentecost rarely comes to us in one of those big dramatic moments like the second chapter of Acts. While it might, more typically Spirit is given in moments of resignation with – a simple prayer in a hospital parking space – God’s Presence – God’s Peace, as Jesus breathes *into* us just what we need to take the next step.

Today we prayed for our Confirmands as they took vows professing their faith. They were confirming the promises made to them in their baptism years ago [move to the font] as prayers were offered for the Holy Spirit to inspire them, to guide them – God’s Presence – God’s Peace.

It’s not that they don’t already have the Holy Spirit within. They do. We all do. Each one of us carries the Divine within. But our prayer today is to inspire once more – to breathe into once again – to remind us all of God’s presence and God’s peace in this important rite of the church.

It’s a prayer that is nurtured at least once a month right here [move to the table] as we receive the elements of love given to us in the “Bread of Life” and “Cup of Joy.” It’s why we each take a vow of commitment promising to participate in the life of the church. Our reminder to us that we cannot do this alone.

God’s Presence – God’s Peace

But there is a deeper purpose for all of this. It is one thing to receive this blessed inspiration – in baptism, in confirmation, in eucharist – it’s another to do something with it. Remember Jesus’ words to his disciples, “As my Father sent me, now I send you.” We have been given the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to go forth and serve. That may take us in any one of a number of directions.

Confirmands, you have so much yet to look forward to – so much yet to discover – so much yet to do. I invite you to listen carefully to what God might be calling forth in you. How are you being called to serve? Using the talents and gifts that you have noticed in you, in what ways might you use them in order to make the world a better place?

It’s a question we must all ask of ourselves – and continuously. As the Father has sent me, now I send you. Do you sense the inspiration of God? If so, can you hear what God is calling forth in you?

May God’s Presence – God’s Peace inspire each one of us on this Pentecost Sunday and may we rise to serve God in our own brokenness as we bring hope to our world.

Amen.

¹Anne H.K. Apple, Living the Word, The Christian Century, May 10, 2017, p.25.