

## PENTECOST 2020 SSP

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; St. John 20:19-23

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In order to understand what happened on the first Day of Pentecost, and what continues to happen as a result in the ongoing life of the Church, let me draw a picture of Jesus and the disciples from the time of his Ministry to his Passion and Death to his Resurrection and Ascension to now – the descent of the Holy Spirit. I’m not good at drawing – I do stick men – so it’s more a diagram than a picture. I’ve drawn this diagram before, but it illustrates a truth that bears constant repeating.

Throughout Jesus’s ministry, more so as he approached Holy Week, and still more so after his Resurrection from the dead, he was at the center as it were of a circle of his apostles, disciples and fellow travelers, all of whom were looking at him, looking inward. They were attracted, drawn, compelled, amazed, but also perplexed, afraid, at what they saw and heard in his words and works. *Above all, they did not understand the necessity of Jesus’s sacrificial death – when in fact his sacrifice was his life’s mission.* He kept repeating this, both before and after his death and resurrection. During his Easter walk with two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, he gave them a Bible study! At this point, they didn’t recognize him, because they were playing the old tapes of misunderstanding the Messiah in their minds: “Jesus was delivered to death...[but] *we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel...* moreover some women of our company amazed us saying they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive...” The Lord replied, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?*” So he explained Moses and all the prophets and opened up the Scriptures for them. When they asked him to stay,

he broke bread at the table...the penny dropped and they recognized him...and he vanished out of their sight. Over and over this pattern repeated itself.

Now, at the Ascension, Jesus visibly *removes himself* from their midst. They have been gathering for nine days since, his mother and family included, in the Upper Room, the same Upper Room used for the Last Supper. He had told them that he was going away and to wait for the “promise of the Father.” He was going away, and it was good for them, because he would send them Another. Another what? Another who? An Advocate, a Comforter, a Counselor, a Strengtheners – the very Breath of God. “You shall receive Power,” Jesus had told them. The word for power, *dunamis*, is the root of dynamite, dynamo, dynamic. On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after his resurrection at nine o’clock in the morning, the Power came, God the Spirit *showed up*, the Breath, the rushing mighty wind descended, with tongues of fire on their heads.

They bundled down the stairs into the street. It is crucial to remember that everything except one thing is the same. The place is the same place where they locked the doors in fear, the city is the same, with the same authorities – Pilate, Annas-and-Caiaphas, Herod – whose earthly power made them quail with fear, intimidated their leader Peter to deny Jesus three times (once with a curse) when asked by a young woman if he was with him. In one of his resurrection appearances, Jesus healed Peter of that self-inflicted wound, asking him three times if he, Peter, loved him, and telling him to “feed my sheep.” Same people, same place. The difference: *The Power*. There is Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, standing up for Jesus in front of everybody, convicting them, inviting them, winning them for Jesus Christ of Nazareth – the Church is beginning to turn the world upside down. Not just Peter, all of them, betting their lives on the truth as it is in Jesus. It was the most important series of events in human history.

Now let me change gears...

I am about to go out the door as Interim Rector of Saint Stephen's. I am going away. By no means do I liken myself to Jesus; I am a sinner, a redeemed old sinner who is grateful to the Lord for saving me from myself and bearing with me and my foolishness all these years. I am grateful to share with others what Jesus has given me. This past year, I have seen how much love there is at Saint Stephen's for Jesus and for his little flock here on College Hill, for the Sacraments and for the goodly heritage of this dear old parish.

Hold on. One thing the coronavirus has taught us for sure, as the sign outside on George Street says, is that the church is the people, not the building. No matter how beautiful it may be and how much of a hold the sanctuary building may have on us, it is secondary, the physical house set apart to be a home for the Body of Christ, the People of God. They are primary.

In my twelve months here I have also seen how, in the absence of a Priest controlling and taking care of everything, or in my case, the presence of a part-time Interim Rector who hasn't the time or the strength to control or do everything – or much of anything for that matter! – I have seen the people of Saint Stephen's and their chosen lay leaders get their minds, hearts and hands around things in wonderful ways: Keeping the daily masses going. Warming to fellowship with one another. Looking to do outreach in witness and in-reach in pastoral care. Having a good increase in pledges and income. Getting your arms around the endowments and invested funds. Organizing the Search for a priest to be your new Full Time Rector – and you are on the cusp of that most crucial discernment – of discovering who the Lord is calling to come here, this coming June and in the fall. I doubt if Saint Stephen's has ever had a Search so representative of the desires of all her people. The signs are good from the Bishop and from everyone involved. *This is Saint Stephen's Pentecostal moment, your empowerment by the Comforter, the Guide, the Strengtheners.* I am so grateful to have witnessed all this, together with my fellow priests who

have helped with so much. Saint Stephen's is a much beloved Anglo-Catholic family of Jesus Christ with a goodly heritage. May our Lord the Holy Spirit now descend, bless, protect, lead, and always be with you. Now let's see what happens. Check the Book of the Acts of the Apostles after Pentecost for some cues.

In the Name of the true and living God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.