

Sermon, June 5, 2022
Romans 8:1-17

“The Church in the Power of the Spirit”

Today is Pentecost Sunday - a day in which we commemorate the birth of the Church beginning with the disciple's empowerment in the Holy Spirit, but we must be careful not to see it as a one and done occasion. Rather it is a time to recognize that the Spirit is, in fact, the life blood of the church - the Spirit who presides over the upbuilding and renewal of the church and infuses us with the light of Christ.

The scriptures provide us with a picture of the inseparable relationship between Jesus and the Spirit, and that we are the beneficiaries of that relationship. As we hear in today's reading, “anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

In the second account of creation in Genesis, God creates Adam from the dust of the earth and brings him to life through divine breath. Again, in John, on the day of the resurrection, Jesus breathes upon the disciples giving them the Holy Spirit. (Remember that in both the Greek and Hebrew languages the words for spirit and breath are the same.) Psalm 33 says, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth.” God gives life through his breath. Through his breath Jesus gives New Life, and the New Life is not for individuals alone - it is for the church as a whole.

On the day that John the Baptist baptizes Jesus we see the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the image of a dove. This is more than a symbol of God's approval. It is a sign of Jesus being anointed in the Spirit empowering him to proclaim good news to the poor, to work miracles, to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Again, just as the Spirit empowered Jesus, so it is meant to empower the church.

In the 14th chapter of John, Jesus tells his disciples what is to come after he is no longer with them physically. He says, “And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you”. We may consider that by the world he is referring to that aspect of human life entrenched in sin that blinds us to the presence of the Spirit. This is what Paul is referring to in today's reading when he talks of being in the flesh as opposed to life in the Spirit. and that the eyes open to seeing the Spirit are those who have accepted forgiveness through faith. -

It is the Spirit that dwells within us that empowers us for ministry just as Jesus was empowered through the anointing of the Spirit. And as Paul indicates in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, through the Spirit different members of the congregation are given different gifts and talents for the upbuilding and renewal of the church. Likewise,

as we also hear in this morning's reading, it is in the Spirit that we are bound together as one. He says that Jews and Greeks, and slaves and free, are all brought into unity through the one Spirit that dwells within. In the language of the day 'Greeks' basically meant Gentiles, and slaves and free points to the fact that issues such as social status, as well as race, ethnicity, etc., which too often cause division between people, have no place in the Body of Christ. Empowered by the Spirit we strive to overcome such division as advocates for peace and justice, as well as harmony between all people. May we truly become what Rev. Dr. King called the Beloved Community - a world of non-violence and love. Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious God, we are grateful that on this sacred day so many years ago you blessed the church with the gift of your Holy Spirit, and we pray that Spirit may continue to guide and inspire us, to lead into your truth, and to bind us together as one. May your Holy Spirit continue to unbuild and renew your church, teaching us how to best bear witness to your love, and to continue to engage in the struggle for social justice and peace. We ask as well that you bless this congregation, and that your Holy Spirit, come and dwell within us now and in all the days to come. Amen.