

Today is the important Feast Day of Pentecost, and Pentecost is a Jewish Spring harvest festival. The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word meaning 50th, and we celebrate the Day of Pentecost 50 days after Easter Day. If you remember, last week was Ascension Day remembering the story of Jesus leaving his disciples as he ascended into heaven, assuring them that he would come back to them. Today's the day that that promise was fulfilled, as Jesus does indeed return to his disciples by his Spirit. The story of his promise being fulfilled is a fabulous story. It's got lots of vivid elements to it, tongues of fire, rushing winds, accusations of drunkenness, mass baptisms. It's all there.

But the first thing I want to say about this story that we read in the Book of Acts is something a bit more humdrum. I want to draw your attention to where all this took place. We read that it happened in a house where they were sitting. I was drawn to this detail because I'm very aware that for much of the past 15 months many of us haven't been in church to worship. We've been worshipping whilst sitting in our houses. I'm also aware that for many people, when we got used to it, this proved to a very positive experience. I've had many people say over the last year or so how powerful they found the online services. Particularly people noticed how the way the readings and the sermons were impacting them, perhaps in a way that doesn't happen in church, and that things were taking on a new resonance and significance.

And the lesson we are learning is that worship doesn't only happen in church. We could worship God anywhere. We could worship God in our homes. We don't have to be in a church or a holy place. The disciples weren't in the temple when the Spirit came on them at Pentecost. They were at home. God's Holy Spirit isn't found in places so much as he's found in people. St. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" and the you there is singular. St. Paul calls us God's temple

as God dwells in his people by his Spirit. That's an amazing thought we would do well to ponder.

We often talk about churches, a group of people being one body and we're all members with a part to play, and we focus often on the corporate side of church life, which is of course well and good. But today in this story of Pentecost, there's a slightly different emphasis as we contemplate that individually we are also God's temple. St. Paul, who wrote a lot about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, says this in Ephesians, "I pray that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Holy Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

God, by his Spirit, dwells in our hearts, and this remarkable truth is demonstrated and illustrated in the story of Pentecost by the manner in which the Holy Spirit came. The Spirit didn't come like a wildfire ripping through the house. Instead, it says that "divided tongues of fire appeared amongst them and a tongue rested on each of them," and this was a sign that each of them individually were receiving the gift of God's Spirit. St. Basil the Great, the wonderful Fourth Century theologian, was the first theologian to write a treatise specifically on the Holy Spirit, and he developed this insight of the way that the Spirit has both a corporate and an individual element, and he says this. I'll read a quote. It's quite dense, but I think it's worth hearing.

Basil said, "The Spirit is shared without loss of ceasing to be entire after the likeness of a sunbeam whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it's shown on him alone. And yes, illumines land and sea and mingles with the air, just as when a sunbeam falls on a bright and transparent body. They themselves become brilliant too and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves. So souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual and send forth their grace to others." Take it from St. Basil, Jesus really does want you for a sunbeam. God by his Spirit dwells in our hearts.

Paul says in Romans, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." And the language of pouring is picked up by St. Peter in the sermon that he gives that first Pentecost. "In the last day," he says quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." Poured there is the key word. Not trickled or dripped, but poured. God's love, God's Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts. That's why it says the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, not half-filled but filled, because God doesn't do half measures.

Today is the day that the giving and the gift of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled. The promise that was made in Joel and the Old Testament was repeated by Jesus to his disciples. It's a promise that is fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Spirit finally comes upon God's people, and we are the heirs of that promise. We too can be filled with the indwelling Spirit of God. We can ask God to pour his life-giving Holy Spirit into our hearts. The Spirit is still a transforming Spirit just as the Spirit transformed those first disciples.

The disciples in the story were transformed from a fearful group of men huddled together in a house to a fearless group of evangelists preaching to the crowd. The amazing thing, the miraculous thing in this story isn't that they were speaking in different tongues, it's that they were speaking at all. They'd been afraid to say anything up until this point. Note how the disciples were equipped for the task that was before them. They weren't enabled to speak Esperanto or some mystical universal language. They were able to speak to the crowd that was gathered there in Jerusalem so that all the crowd heard it, each in their own tongue. The Holy Spirit transformed the disciples, gave them an ability to do something that they couldn't do on their own, and that's still the case.

As Christians, we're not into self-improvement, self-development, self-realization. We're into transformation, the transformation that comes when we receive God's Spirit, when we open ourselves up to that work and allow the Spirit to

empower and dwell and transform us. Let me quote St. Paul again. "We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."

I'm going to leave you with an illustration of all that I've been saying. It was a favorite that my dad used to use. In fact, he used it each Pentecost as far as I remember. He loved vivid illustrations. He once shaved in the pulpit. I remember that well. I've no idea the point he was illustrating, but I can remember it well. He also ate a daffodil, and I don't know what point he was making then. But I do remember the point he was making when he brought a glove into church and carried it into the pulpit. He pointed out that that glove was limp, couldn't do anything on its own. But when a hand goes into the glove, suddenly life comes to the glove, which can pick things up and move and wave because the glove is energized by the hand that is within it. It could do things when it was indwelt by the hand that the glove couldn't do before. We are the glove, and the Holy Spirit is the hand that comes and brings life to that which was limp.

May we, this Pentecost, be open to receiving the indwelling gift of God's Holy Spirit. Amen.