

Pentecost Sermon  
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Last week we talked about the apostles' reactions to Christ ascending into heaven—how even though Christ had told them time and time again that he would eventually leave them, the apostles couldn't quite bring themselves to believe that. We talked about how the apostles were convinced that Christ wasn't *really* going to leave, but would actually usher in God's kingdom within their lifetimes. But we know that didn't happen. Christ did, in fact, ascend into heaven after his resurrection, where he is seated at the right hand of the Father, where he will remain until he comes again to judge the world. Now the apostles may have been tempted to think that that was the end of their involvement in Christ's ministry—they may have thought that now that Christ was gone, and would only return to usher in God's kingdom, that the apostles no longer had a role to play. Perhaps they thought that the people of the world could just sit around twiddling their thumbs until Christ returned.

But if any of the apostles were under this impression, Christ, in last week's readings, showed them they were in for a rude awakening. Just because Christ ascended into heaven, didn't mean that the apostles' work was done. Last week we heard the assurances that Christ gave to his disciples before the ascension. He told his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. No, the apostles' work was far from over. They needed to continue Christ's ministry until his coming again. There would be no room for sitting around and waiting.

Which brings us to today. Apparently the apostles in spite of Christ's farewell message, were not doing a whole lot until today. In scripture we are told that after Christ ascended into heaven, the apostles cast lots to see who should take Judas' place among the twelve, the lot fell on Matthias...and then nothing. There was nothing else the apostles did of note until today. But what happened today changed everything, because it fulfilled the promise that Christ gave to the apostles before he ascended into heaven in a surprising and astounding way. When the apostles were gathered together a loud sound like a violent gust of wind filled the entire house they were staying in. And then something like tongues of fire appeared and touched each one of them. And when this happened, the apostles were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit, and began speaking in other languages. The people who were gathered were amazed because even though they spoke different languages from one another, they could all understand what was being said by the twelve. And this wasn't because the apostles were speaking in different native languages. It's not as if Peter was speaking Mesopotamian and Matthias was speaking Cappadocian, so each onlooker was able to simply listen to whoever was speaking their native language in order to understand what was being said. No, the Holy Spirit was enabling the apostles to do something extraordinary, to speak in a language that somehow allowed ANYONE to understand them, no matter where they were from. The Holy Spirit, which Christ had promised would aid the apostles, has revealed its power.

Of course, there were some witnesses to these events who were skeptical. They didn't believe this miraculous event was possible. So they sneered and claimed that those involved in this miracle of the Holy Spirit were simply drunk, and didn't even know what they were doing. Yet Peter assured these naysayers that no one was drunk (it was only nine in the morning), and pointed out a passage from the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament, that helped explain what was happening. "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." No, what was happening was not a drunken display, but an act of God, an act of God foretold by the prophet Joel and by Christ himself. The apostles had received the gift of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, just as Christ had promised before he ascended into heaven.

And just as Christ had promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, and they acted as Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And they

were able to do this because the twelve apostles who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were not the only ones to receive the Holy Spirit. As we discussed last week, the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to each and every Christian, to each and every one of us. So it wasn't just 12 people who received the Spirit to help them further Christ's work in the world, it was billions upon billions of people throughout history. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Each Christian is given a gift by the Holy Spirit to help them to a specific calling, a specific purpose. And together as Christians, as Christ's body in the world, we are able to work towards the common good.

Though not all people are given the gift of language that the apostles received on the day of Pentecost, we each have unique gifts that we must search out. We have only to pray and to look within ourselves to find those abilities that would help us act as witnesses of Christ. But sometimes bearing witness to Christ is no small feat. Because the values of the world—things like wealth, power, and fame can often conflict with the values of Christ, who taught us that those with the least are most blessed, and that we should care for one another just as he cared for us. We see the ways of this world, and because of the scriptures and the Holy Spirit we can see the ways in which this world goes against the ways of Christ. But we are to use our gifts and our knowledge to live in a way that does not glorify the world, but glorifies God, and furthers the work of Christ in, even if that means sometimes fighting an uphill battle.

But we know that we are not alone in our endeavors to follow Christ in this world. And though we may be tempted to think that we can just sit around and twiddle our thumbs until Christ comes, we know that we have each been called to a holy calling to further Christ's ministry. Though Christ has ascended into heaven, Christ's ministry is not over. The season after Pentecost reminds us that we Christians are Christ's body, we are the Church, and we are reminded of all that the Church does and should and will do in Christ's name with the help of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we are each called to a holy calling to minister in the name of Christ. And we are each uniquely enabled to live into those callings. What gifts of the Spirit have we, the people of St. Thomas, received? How can we use those gifts in the service of God? What will we do to act as Christ's body and witness to Christ to the ends of the earth?