

Sermons at Christ Church

Be One Body in Christ, Belonging to Each Other.

Pentecost

The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Today is a very important day in the life of the Church. Today marks the day the promised Holy Spirit descended on the friends of Jesus. Today, we remember hearing for the first time, the story about God, not in any one particular language but in the multiplicity of languages. Today, we remember the moment the Spirit of God filled ordinary men and empowered them to tell the story of God in a way that hasn't been told before. Today, we remember those who heard the story of God's purpose for creation, God's purpose for you and me, believed in that story and committed themselves to it. Today, we tell the story of the Spirit that is in us, which empowers us to call God, Abba father.

Today, we tell the story of the Spirit that is in us-the Spirit which gives us the power to go out and manifest God's glory. Not only in the celebration of our particular identities, but in celebration of a God whose beauty rest in the unified celebration of all our identities. It is this God who makes us aware that our particular identities, the particular language that we speak isn't enough.

Genesis tells us that it used to be that we all spoke one language. We understood each other. We could build things together. But the Lord caused this division among us and scattered us across the face of the earth. If the attempt of the writer of Genesis was to explain the multiplicity of languages, the multiplicity of particularities, the multiplicity of people, the multiplicity of God's creation, the story of Pentecost is about how we can hear beyond those particularities, how in the midst of our multiplicity, we can still love each other.

If the gospel is to be heard, then it must be beyond each tribe, language or people. If the gospel is to be heard it must undo those identities that provide a false sense of security. If the gospel is to be heard, it wouldn't matter which language you speak, people can still understand your words. After all, the gospel isn't only about words.

On this day, the friends of Jesus were locked up in the Upper Room. They were sore afraid. The authorities don't want to hear anything about a resurrected Jesus. In fact, they don't want to hear about him at all. These friends of Jesus are in hiding, awaiting the promised comforter. One morning as they waited, the Holy Spirit descended on them and filled the entire house.

They were so filled with the Spirit as divided tongues as of fire rested on them. Filled with the Spirit, these friends of Jesus went out and told the stories of God's salvation in Christ-the very name for which they had to hide themselves.

The Spirit in Hebrew is *ruach*. It is the creative power of God which gave the disciples the power to go out without fear to tell the story of God's new creation-a new creation where each can hear the hopes, aspirations, groaning and the longing of others, to believe them and to desire to be with them and walk with them.

Those who heard the disciples were astonished because these fisher folks told the improbable story of God's visitation to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And they told the story with such an amazing conviction that those who heard them were moved not only by the words that they heard but the courage with which they told the story of God in Christ. They were moved because they could hear the new story of God in a language that they could understand-Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia and Rome, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cretans and Arabs. All these people could now hear, for the first time in their own language the miracle of the good news which offers life by saving us.

Peter spoke in his native language but what he spoke needed no translation because everyone heard the words in their own native language. They heard these words as if from a familiar voice. As the disciples spoke, their hearers came to discover that the disciples were not some talented speakers, but that the spoken Word had become its own seeker-the Word was seeking those who would care to listen and believe it as the good news of God in Christ, the Word was seeking those who desired to make a difference in their lives and in the world around them. The Word was seeking those who find their fulfillment in love.

In speaking to the people gathered, Peter quotes the prophet Joel and provides the prophetic context for their public testimony-God promised to pour His Spirit upon all flesh so all may be empowered to say the unsayable, to touch the untouchable, to love the unlovable and to know that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. With this, Peter provides this huge assurance to his hearers that the good news of God in Christ was meant for them as well, and they also shall be saved should they call upon the name of the Lord. When have you thought about calling on the name of the Lord? When have you desired to be saved or to be made anew?

The *Spirit* of God makes new creation possible. The Spirit of God makes new things possible by disrupting the status quo. The Spirit refuses to take the world as is, it flips that world, turning our laissez-faire attitude into action, unbelief into belief and faithlessness into faithfulness. It speaks into our reality, giving us eyes to see things not as they are, but as they should be.

When you are saved, you begin to see and hear things as they should be. And when you begin to see and hear things as they should be, you will notice that the good news subverts your old life. It takes you to a wilderness where you realize that your sufficiency depends only on the one God who provides us manna from above, and water from the rock. It is the place where we refuse to be consumed by the attractions of a world which convinces us that we are self-sufficient, should live like silos, and to mistrust and hate those who are different from us.

The good news of Pentecost is about the insufficiency of hate and the abundance of love. It is about the inadequacy of tribal identity and the renewal of a communal identity because not only can we hear the same good news but we are moved by the same good news.

The *Spirit* of God not only convinces you of its same presence in the other, but through your participation in the waters of Baptism you come to identify yourself with the other who also bears the seal of Christ. Even if they do not bear the seal of Christ, they also breathe God's *Spirit* because that is the life that God breathed into us at creation. For this reason, we encounter every human being with the expectation of meeting God because it is in creatures like you and me that God awaits our love.

You and I live in an aching world. It is a world which yearns for truth, desires honesty and craves for love. The truth that our world cries for is not one where each can have his or her own version of truth, but it is the kind of truth to which we can all attest-that life is valuable, and each life is precious because God's *Spirit* abides in it. For that reason alone, it is our solemn duty to protect each life from all sorts of hate and violence.

The gift of God's *Spirit* makes possible vital energies for life. When we get to this point in our lives, we live a more wholly life and can undividedly affirm life. Our wanderings are over. Not only have we reached our goal, but we are conscious of God's happiness in us and conscious of ourselves in God's bliss. This is the time when we long for the love in which we forget ourselves and at the same time find ourselves.

The Spirit of God is such that we cannot confine it to sacred moments or sacred places. To be sure, the Spirit is present there as well-it pervades all of life, creating goodness and beauty in the midst of suffering and death. The *Spirit* of God burns to inspire hope in us and everyone because each of us is the universe looking at itself.

An author once wrote "Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary was God for us, and Pentecost is God in us." God in us, inspiring us for the work of ministry. The work of ministry abounds. What is God calling you to do? What is the kind of testimony you would want to offer? What story can you tell about God's salvation?

Today is an important day because God has chosen to rest His Spirit on you. Today is an important day because we are hearing for the first time, the good news of God in Christ. Today is an important that day because God desires that you may go out, empowered by the Spirit, to tell the story of God's love in a language that someone can understand, and to live the story of God's love in a way that someone can understand.

Amen.