

PENTECOST (WHITSUNDAY) 2014
SERMON – CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ACTS 2.1 ST. JOHN 14.15

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Let's imagine we are gathered with the Apostles and the others on that first Pentecost. Let's imagine what it was like to experience the strong wind blowing through the entire house. Think Category 2 Tornado...anyone who has lived in Tornado Alley...knows what that is like. Only what we are experiencing is not the destructive force of a tornado...but the empowering and life-giving force of the Holy Spirit...the Holy Helper.

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel wrote, "God says, I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams...and then whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved".

Jesus promised the Apostles when he returned to the Father in heaven he would not leave them alone...he would send them help...he would send them the Holy Spirit...the Holy Helper! They didn't understand what he meant and watched with amazement as he was taken up into heaven. They could only wonder what was next. What was next was Pentecost!

Pentecost is the old Greek and Latin name for the Jewish spring harvest festival called the "Feast of Weeks" talked about in Exodus and Deuteronomy. It commemorated God's giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses fifty days after the Exodus and it marked the conclusion of the Passover celebrations.

In the Church's liturgical year Pentecost takes place fifty days after Easter...we remember the words to the Easter Canticle..."Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the Feast." In the early days of the Church...Easter, Ascension and Pentecost...were celebrated as one great season...with Pentecost being the end of the Easter Season.

Let's rejoin the Apostles and the others. The sound of the rushing mighty wind is followed by the appearance of tongues of fire on the Apostles' heads and they begin to speak in other languages. Several thousand people are still in Jerusalem and they ask themselves what is happening. Some of them are making

fun of the Apostles and accuse them of being drunk...at 9 o'clock in the morning.

Perhaps the most remarkable event we witness is what happens next. Peter, no longer the coward who ran away from Jesus the night before he died, no longer the clumsy and impulsive fisherman, got his second wind...and that wind was the Holy Spirit...the Holy Helper...who made him strong. Peter shouts, "We are not drunk"!

Peter speaks bravely and says that what we are seeing and hearing was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and that God's plan to reconcile all humankind to himself was accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter then preaches what will become the most powerful sermon of his life. And many people listen and respond to what Peter says and believe and get baptized and they take the Good News about Jesus home with them and spread it around.

The perfect present Jesus has given us **IS** the Holy Spirit...the Holy Helper himself. It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens us and teaches our hearts the truth about Jesus...and who helps us as the Collect puts it...to have right judgment in all things. Having right judgment in all things means we must then take action and do the right things. And our work must be a labor of love.

Jesus tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments. A commandment is something we must do; it's not a suggestion or an option. Jesus tells us to love one another just as much as he loves us. Keeping his commandments is part of our work. The strength we get to love God above all else and love our neighbors as God loves us comes from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised us he would not leave us without help and he hasn't. He kept his promise. His gift of the Holy Spirit is the most perfect birthday gift because he is the gift that keeps on giving.

Let us thank God for the gift of his Holy Spirit and ask in the words the bishop uses at a Confirmation: ***that God will bless us with his grace; that we may continue to be his children forever; and that the Holy Spirit will increase in our lives more and more each day, until we come into his everlasting kingdom.***

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