

The Day of Pentecost – Acts 2:1-21
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ

Gathering Disciples, Sending Apostles

*“When the day of Pentecost had come,
the disciples were all together in one place.*

The Day of Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles occurs fifty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke tells us that about 120 people from all across the Greco-Roman empire were gathered together in Jerusalem because Jesus had promised that his Father would send them another Advocate. The Holy Spirit did show up. But the experiences of the Holy Spirit in this context were waaaaay different than the one that some of them had witnessed at Jesus' baptism. This was no sweet heavenly dove floating down to bless them and reassure them of God's abiding presence. This time, the power and might of the Holy Spirit was expressed as a rush of violent wind. This time, the Holy Spirit filled all of the people with new energy, new life, new abilities, and new directions for manifesting God's mission. This event was both exciting and confusing. How was it possible that they could now communicate in so many different ways? How could they receive, proclaim, and engage with such certitude and conviction?

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit. And Jesus delivered the Holy Spirit. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus also told his followers that they would be witnesses to his extravagant message of love - not just in their personal circle

of friends and family in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria - but out into the world into places they never imagined they would be. These followers were empowered and equipped to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, to the ends of the earth and with people they had yet to meet. If it hadn't been for their amazing new knowledge and wisdom, Jesus' followers might not have believed that it really was the Holy Spirit who had shown up and alighted their minds and hearts and entire beings to prophesy God's truth. But each one of them was now overflowing with wonderful new spiritual gifts, and each one of them was empowered and profoundly moved to share the message of God's love everywhere and with everyone.

From the moment that the disciples were propelled out into the world with their new gifts to share, these followers of Jesus were transformed into apostles. They became leaders and proclaimers in word and action. They became healers and teachers in homes and communities. They became messengers of compassion and hope wherever they went. Even though the Holy Spirit gave them diverse gifts, each embodied various instances of God's love in the world. No gift was better than the other. No ministry was more important than another. All gifts contributed to the whole and functioned interdependently for the sake of the common good – the common good that reveals God's activity in the world for the purpose of God's mission.

Here at St. Andrew's, we experience similar manifestations of the Spirit in our own faith community through worship and various ministries – those that nourish relationships within our church, and those that cultivate local partnerships and collaborative ministries outside these walls. These movements of the Spirit - through us, and with us, and in us - sometimes occur in familiar ways and in recognizable patterns. At other times the Spirit shows up in unpredictable and inconvenient ways – ways that disrupt the rhythm of our comfortable lives. These movements of the Spirit coax us, and guide us and propel us into new life; new life that is both amazing and bewildering; astonishing and frightening. But no matter how we experience the Spirit moving in our personal lives, we are never alone. For the Spirit fills us up with new life and draws us toward the love of God in community. As followers of Christ led by the Holy Spirit, we are meant to be disciples in community and apostles with community – for together we are creating the Beloved Community of God.

On this Day of Pentecost, the Spirit guided us here into this community where we continue to engage in a pattern of discipleship that was modeled for us by the first followers of Jesus. Since the church's renewed liturgical movement which raises up the ministries of all the baptized, our pattern of worship has offered us a framework for living into the Good News of Jesus Christ not just here in this sanctuary, but out into our daily lives wherever we

live and work and play. Our patterns of worship and practices of ministry are sacramental expressions of our faith; sacramental because what we do and how we are in the world are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

As you may have observed, the overarching pattern of our worship service is: Gather – Word – Meal - Sent out. Like today's account of the first Pentecost, we gather together in one place as disciples. Gathering implies a common location with a common purpose. And that common purpose is to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for all that we have and all that we are. We invite the Holy Spirit to nurture our minds through reading and reflecting on the Word. We ask the Holy Spirit to nourish us with holy food. And we rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit as we are sent out into the world to share Good News wherever we are and with all whom we encounter – in our daily travels and in our seasonal travels; in our planned journeys and our unexpected detours. The Holy Spirit leads us and guides us and prompts us in all of the various ways in which we go out and share God's love, and come back in for refreshment and renewal.

Just over a decade ago, while I was on tour with St. John's Cathedral Choir, we were in residence at St. Thomas-Fifth Avenue in New York City. Of course, I stopped in their gift shop to browse, and found a small collection of prayers and readings compiled by Christopher Webber for use during travel. Repeated

throughout *A Traveler's Prayer Book* there is one prayer that I found both comforting and reassuring not only when I travel for business or pleasure; but to reflect on in my journey through the changes and chances, and twists and turns of daily life.

||: May the Lord watch over my going out and my coming in from this time forth for evermore. :||

This prayer acknowledges the inward and outward movements of our physical lives, and the interior and exterior aspects of our spiritual journeys. It acknowledges Christ's abiding presence and implies that the Holy Spirit guides our actions and activities for the sake of God's mission in the world. This prayer encourages me to notice movements of the Holy Spirit that invite, and encourage, and even demand my response. Not just a response from me as an individual follower of Christ, but a response alongside other members of God's beloved community. The Holy Spirit calls us into community to discern God's will alongside other disciples, and sends us out as apostles into our wider communities empowered and equipped to share God's love in the world.

At this particular time in the shared life of St. Andrew's congregation, we are exploring how we share God's love inside this church and outside through existing ministries and those yet to be created. The Holy Spirit is prompting us to go out into our neighborhoods and communities and

proclaim God's love in thought, word and deed. And together, we will discern and create what that looks like for us and for future generations.

Going out into the world can sometimes be a daunting and scary task. We have seen across our nation, in our communities, and even among our households how divisive language can be – what we say and how we say it can damage and fracture relationships. But we have also heard contemporary prophets such as Parker Palmer encouraging civil discourse and engaging in non-judgmental listening. When we hear about the Holy Spirit empowering, equipping and sending out apostles to the ends of the earth, we often imagine that they proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ through speaking. But speaking was only one of the gifts that the Spirit gave them.

We often don't think of listening as a gift that is bestowed by the Spirit. But when we listen for guidance, we listen differently. When we listen for understanding, we hear with fresh ears. When we listen attentively, we listen beyond our prejudices and assumptions. Listening and sharing are gifts of mutual blessings that we experience when praying together; in pastoral care settings; in support group meetings; in conversations with loved ones.

Listening helps us notice the movement of the Holy Spirit in new ways.

Listening encourages us to respond not with habitual ways of fixing, but with wondering type questions that are open ended and leave room for the activity of the Holy Spirit. Listening allows us to be with what is in this moment in

time with the Spirit and with one another. Listening allows us to be with and allows us simply to be.

Some of you may be familiar with the popular saying: “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words.” Our call as a community of faith is to witness to God’s love not just through words, but through our very being. Our call as a community of hope is to embody a ministry of presence – showing up for a friend in need; being with someone when they just need to talk; offering a meal to a neighbor who recently returned home from the hospital. Our call as a faith community is to be apostles in all our communities, collaborating as witnesses of God’s love - for together we are empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit to embody God’s one Beloved Community now and through eternity.

May the Holy Spirit guide us into all truth, and may the Lord watch over our going out and our coming in from this time forth forevermore.

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