

A Sermon Preached On the Occasion of: Pentecost A.D. 2003

Saint David's Episcopal Church

- ▶ **Text:** The Acts of the Apostles
- ▶ **Title:** Pentecost is not so much the Birth of the Church as it is *it's first day on the job.*
- ▶ **Preacher:** The Reverend Fr. P. S. Winton

For a lot of people it is the shower. For some it is the garden. For many it is while driving. For some it is while sleeping. For me, it is often the ironing board. That place where we have those aha! Experiences. It was yesterday afternoon. I was ironing vestments for today's Pentecost services when all of a sudden it dawned on me that we are wrong.

Today marks the 50th day after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On this day – it is a story we all know well – the Apostles were assembled in the upper room, the doors and windows were locked and suddenly a noise like a mighty rushing wind roared through

The City and flames of unconsuming fire rested on the heads of the Apostles and on the furniture in the upper room. The Apostles were moved to the balcony where they preached to the great crowd that had gathered outside to see what all the noise and commotion was about. And each hearing the Apostles speak in a Galilean dialect, could understand exactly what was being said no matter what part of the world they were from or what language they spoke. And from this moment on the Apostles began to travel and teach and preach and heal and exhort and save and do sort of amazing things.

And we call this the birth of the Christian Church.

And we are wrong.

Pentecost was not the birth of the Church.

The birth of the Church was Easter, or maybe Good Friday, or Maybe Maundy Thursday. Perhaps the birth of the Church was coincidental to the birth of Christ. Or maybe the moment that the Angel Gabriel told Blessed Mary that she would give birth to God on earth was the birth of the Church. Or when God told Jeremiah that he would imprint the human heart with the desires of God.

The truth is, the Church was up and going in a fashion in those fifty days after the resurrection. The text tells us that the Apostles went to temple every day and repeated the meal they had with Jesus every day. In a word – they were doing Church.

I will spend, I can assure you, and many hours in study over the next several weeks trying to answer this question. But I can say this with certainty – that Pentecost – is no better selection as the birthday of the Church than other marker day. Until several hours ago I was perfectly content with Pentecost as the birth of the Church myself so I am still working out some details and I am left with the question:

If it isn't really the birth of the Church – and yet it clearly was a significant event in the life of the Church or Saint Luke would not have recorded it in such detail – what IS the significance?

Why all the fuss?

Because something DID happen.

The Church was freed – liberated.

These men sat in a small dark room with the doors and windows shut and locked. They snuck out every day to say their prayers and they shared the Eucharist every day and they waited in fear.

And for good reason. They were – so far as they knew the last remnants of a movement gone badly. The excitement of empty tomb had begun to wane and Jesus – Jesus had ascended into heaven – and even though He said He would be back – He refused to say when – and they were all marked men – enemies of the Empire – followers of a crucified rebel and subject to arrest and the same fate of Jesus. Any knock at the door could be a Roman patrol – ready to take them to crosses of their own.

At 4 o'clock this morning a small group of men gathered to blow up over 1000 balloons to decorate the Church for today. They filled each balloon helium and then spent considerable effort to keep them all corralled while they tied them together put them in place and then tied and or weighted them down. If you were to look at the bunches of balloons in the windows you would note that they are weighted down with sections of chain.

When I saw those sections of chain I realized the point to Pentecost.

If I were to take a knife or scissors and cut each bunch above the chain I would be doing roughly what the Holy Spirit did on Pentecost – I would set them free – they would be

No longer be bound.

What the Holy Spirit does on Pentecost is set the Apostles free to do the *work* of the Church. It is not enough to merely be together huddled together in our upper rooms, like a private club with the doors and windows locked – in fear of what might happen if we proclaim Christ boldly to the world. And once they started they not only amazed others they amazed themselves at what they could do in the faithful Name of Jesus.

I think that one of the most important things accomplished on the Day of Pentecost is that the doors and windows were blown open and the Apostles were forced into the company and community of others.

In their fear you see, the Apostles were the original “frozen chosen” – it was like they had never seen Jesus do anything – as if in 3 years of living and working with Jesus they had learned nothing.

And then suddenly, loosed from their fear – by the power of the Holy Spirit they were set free from their hiding they were able to do all the things Jesus told they would be able to do – they healed the sick, they set captives free, they nurtured and cared for and loved and taught and brought people by the droves together to worship Christ Jesus – risen from the dead – and to a man gave their life for the work of the Church.

Pentecost is not so much the birth of the church

as it is its first day on the job.

What the Holy Spirit said to the Apostles the Holy Spirit says to us –and to the whole Church – a message made only stronger and more urgent by the passing of time: in a word the message is this:

It's time to go to work.

And so it is.

In the weeks and months ahead you will hear from me and the lay leadership of the parish what that is going to look like here at Saint David's and what that is going to cost. It cost the Apostles their lives – it will cost us nothing like that.

But as we have pondered and studied the feedback we have received in the Strategic Planning process and as we prepare for Master Planning it is clear to us that the Holy Spirit is saying in a powerful, loving, challenging way – it is time to go to work. Time to go to work at St. David's in new and amazing ways and even ways that are a little frightening. We are called as clearly as were the Apostles on the first workday of the Church to step out boldly among God's people and do things we never imagined we could do. What the Holy Spirit has said to us through God's people is that its time to get to work!

Indeed it is.

And indeed we shall.

As we are freed from fear of the unknown.

Freed from the fear that we can't.

Freed from the fear that it will cost too much.

Freed from the fear that it is all too much and too big.

Freed from the fear that we don't know what the future holds.

As we take seriously the power of the Holy Spirit we will find, as the Apostles did that by following Jesus we are indeed equipped to do what God has called us to do. (cut loose balloons)

We have after all – like our Apostle brothers been set free. Amen.

(Note: There is always an "extra" page beyond the text – in recognition that the Holy Spirit has the final say and not the preacher and that there is most certainly more to say and perhaps a full correction of what has been said.)

