

John 14:8-27 Pentecost/June 5, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy Pentecost! Happy Birthday Church!

Today we mark the light of Christ being handed over to us.

You'll notice that the Paschal candle, sometimes called the Jesus candle, is no longer lit. Instead we have all these little red candles everywhere. They symbolize the Holy Spirit coming upon us and energizing us to do God's work in the world – to continue Jesus' mission - to take the light of Christ out into the world - to share God's love - to care for others - to forgive as we ourselves have been forgiven.

So, Happy Pentecost!

Now, most Christians think that Pentecost is a purely Christian holy day, but it's not. It's Jewish, originally. And, here is what makes this day so interesting for us.

Pentecost is the Jewish celebration of the Law being given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. That happened 50 days after Passover and their escape from Egypt. Pentecost is literally the 50th day.

Now, the resurrection happens about the same time as Passover, and we celebrate Pentecost on the 50th day of the resurrection, 10 days after Jesus ascended back into heaven.

So, you might see some parallels here. Although Moses was on the mountain much longer than 10 days, 40 days to be exact, in both instances, a gift is sent from God to help the people. For the Jews it was the 10 Commandments. For Christians it is the Holy Spirit.

The 10 Commandments were sent to help the Israelites live in community with one another. We, unfortunately, know how well that worked. Not so good. But, it was meant as a gift of freedom. A gift to keep the people going forward as God's chosen people. A way to live in community for the good of all.

Fast forward 1400 years, give or take, and not only does God come to us in the flesh to heal us and teach us to love, when he returns to heaven Jesus sends the Holy Spirit. Jesus refuses to leave us here all on our own, dependent on human understandings.

God's Holy Spirit is sent to us to be even closer to us than we are to ourselves. Closer to us than we are to ourselves. That is how much God loves us. God knows us beyond all that we think we know about who we are. Our own perception has been tainted by other people, but God knows us fully and truly does love us.

Not only are we to die for, but we are so loved that God can't bear to be separated from us either. So, God's presence is sent to be with us, always and forever. The Holy Spirit is sent so that we can never forget – never forget God, God's love for us, our value as beloved children, and also our mission to go and share that good news, all that Jesus teaches us, to all people. To share the peace of Christ with everyone.

Moses received the 10 Commandments on Mt. Sinai and brought them down to the people only to find the people offering sacrifice to an Egyptian god, not the God who chose them as God's beloved people. That 40 day separation sent the Israelites off the deep end and back into captivity, back into the life they use to know.

God's not going to let that happen again. God will not let us fall back into the slavery of sin, so God doesn't just send some tablets with advice on them. No. God sends the Holy Spirit, a relationship with God that lives inside of us and lights our way.

Moses brought 10 Commandments to the people. Jesus gave only one – love as you are loved by me, which really sums up all of the 10 Commandments anyway. But he doesn't leave it at that. He sends the Holy Spirit to make it possible to follow them and to know that we are loved and forgiven, so that we can love and forgive others.

And that's really what it is all about, love and forgiveness. We cannot love without forgiveness and we cannot forgive without love. Through the Holy Spirit we are bound in love to God and our relationship with God never ends, that's eternal forgiveness.

And because it's hard to hear the Holy Spirit within us, to hear love and forgiveness from within, we are sent to tell one another the good news over and over again. We are sent to speak the Word of God so that others will also be empowered to build and restore relationships. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Marked as God's beloved, sealed with the cross of Christ forever, the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world to live God's peace and share it with others. The peace of Christ. The peace which passes all human understanding.

So, never forget your baptism. It is a gift that can never be taken from you. Ever. It is your eternal guarantee of God's love and presence with you.

Baptized we are never separated from God and in baptism we know that we are God's beloved child. No matter how anyone else may treat us, God is on our side, closer to us than we are to ourselves, always loving us, only wanting the best for us. That is why the Holy Spirit is called the Advocate.

When I was doing my chaplaincy at University Hospital, they had patient advocates there to take the side of the patient over and above the hospital. A lot of people don't know about that, but if you ever feel as if you are treated unfairly at a hospital, ask for the advocate, or ask for the chaplain if they don't have one.

The advocate takes your side. The advocate stands with you up and against the powers that be in order to bring justice, not Judge Judy after the fact justice, but fair treatment in the moment, proclaiming that this is a beloved child of God, treat them as such!

The Holy Spirit, the big A Advocate, is here with us. Like my big brother fending off bullies, the Holy Spirit is advocating with us against the injustices of this world, against anything that might try to makes us feel that we are any less than who we are – whose we are - children of God – beloved children of God.

And only when we truly understand our value does the Holy Spirit lead us out into the world to share that good news of God's unconditional love, ourselves becoming advocates for those who are oppressed in any way shape or form.

Forgiven, we forgive. Loved, we love. Set free, we free others. One with God, we are one with all who suffer - even those who are oppressive. They too need to be set free – free from their fear and hate.

So, the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world and may make us look like we are drunk, like we are total fools, but that's what God does to us. The Holy Spirit brings us into a new reality. The Holy Spirit makes us see things differently, much differently than the world does, all while holding our hands as we are continually resurrected into the good news of God's unconditional unending love for the world.

The Holy Spirit gives us God's peace, which lives in us, so that we can share that peace with others. That's the mission of the Church. That is our mission as the Church.

Happy Birthday Church! We are 1,989 years old today, and still going strong, not because of what we do, but because of the Holy Spirit working in, with, and among us.

The Holy Spirit is the wind beneath our wings, guiding us and leading us, loving and supporting us, freeing us to live the Kingdom of God here and now.

We are the light of Christ. Thanks be to God! Amen.