

The Day of Pentecost
June 4, 2017, Year A
St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL

Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:26-35
1 Corinthians 12:3-13
John 20:19-23

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

From our gospel reading this morning, we heard these words about Jesus' visit to the disciples after his resurrection: "When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

This passage from the Gospel of John is the spiritual and theological heart of mission. We usually think of the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew as the call to mission – and it is. That is what we are called to do – to go out into all the world to preach and baptize, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

But our acts in mission are only effective because God, the Holy Spirit, is working with us and through us. Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." He is saying "here is my power; use it for the purpose for which I have called you and trained you."

We can't forgive sins. Only God can do that. But we can announce the good news that there is now a path by which sins can be forgiven, and if those who hear us receive our message with joy, then God has promised that their sins will be forgiven, and we can pronounce that in his name.

Now we all know the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. Some seed fell on the path and was eaten by the birds which means the Devil snatched it away before it could take root, while other seed was fell on rock and died because it was not fed, and other seed fell among thorns and was choked by the cares of the world. But some seed fell on good ground and thrived.

When we share the good news, we don't know how or if it will be received. But that is up to God, not us. Our job is to proclaim the good news wherever and whenever we can. In this passage from John, Jesus is making it clear that he is sending the Holy Spirit. He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." And if we think back to the creation narrative in Genesis, all God had to do to create everything that is was to speak. So when Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit," it happened.

That is the spiritual power behind mission. Mission is the work of the Holy Spirit. But our role is so important that if we do not get up and go or get busy and send, nothing will happen. God loves us so much that he has given us an essential role in mission. But it is not all our own doing. The power to get anything done in mission other than taking a trip to a foreign place comes entirely from God. We can lead people to forgiveness of sins and salvation, but only God actually saves.

Mission can only be effective when it is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In our first reading, we heard Luke's account of the coming of the Holy Spirit. "Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

As soon as the Holy Spirit came, the first mission activity took place. The disciples stepped out of the room where they were staying and began to share the good news with anyone who would listen. With empowerment from the Holy Spirit, they were ready. This account is certainly dramatic; thousands of people from all over the Greco-Roman world heard the gospel in their own native languages.

But we must consider that we are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to engage in mission. Each of us was filled with the Holy Spirit when we were saved. Each of us has been called by Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations.

Our New Testament reading tells us how. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote this: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

God chose to make mission a team sport. He, meaning the Holy Spirit in this case, equipped and enabled each one of us individually to play a specific role in the mission activity he called us to collectively. We are one team made up of many members. There are varieties of gifts, service and activities, but all the same Spirit. The Spirit enables us to hear our specific calling as well as our collective calling. He calls our team to a specific mission while calling each of us individually to play a specific part in that mission.

"So let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.