

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Acts 2:1-11
Sunday, June 4, 2017

The birth of the Church

1. I grew up Roman Catholic, and was an RC until I was in high school- though I wasn't actually formally received Anglican until right before my ordination. I went to kindergarten and first grade at Holy Innocents Catholic School. One of the things that I remember from those days was that we would leave class and go to church on holy days. One such day was Pentecost. We were taught that Pentecost was important because it is the birthday of the Church.
2. I can honestly say that I haven't given much thought to that concept over the last 35 years. For some reason, preparing for Pentecost this year, it hit me how accurate of a description that really is.
3. Jesus told his disciples that he had to leave so that he could have the Father send another Helper who will be with them forever.
 - a. Of note in talking about the Holy Spirit and his place in the Trinity, when Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit, he uses personal pronouns. The Holy Spirit is a who and a he, not an it.
4. Last week we looked at the Ascension and how Jesus again promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ministry was in large part about training his followers to preach and teach the truth after he was gone. The completion of that training was for them to receive the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, Jesus poured understanding into the apostles through the Holy Spirit. Then on Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on the apostles at a major Jewish festival in order to move the mission forward and begin the era of the Church.
5. At this point, with Jesus ascended, it wasn't about people following him around, seeing signs and wonders, and listening to his teaching. It was about his followers continuing his teaching and transforming the world by doing so. While Pentecost may not have been about forming an organization known as the Church- with by-laws and property and whatnot- it was definitely about passing the torch to regular people who were eyewitnesses of Christ and establishing a New Covenant community. That all happened on Pentecost, 50 days after Easter and ten days after the ascension.

Empowered to preach

1. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out powerfully upon the apostles so that they could preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to gatherers from all over the known world who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks. It is so fitting that the Feast of Weeks is when God chose to do this mighty work, as it was the festival of harvest. There is a clear sign here that God was preparing a new harvest, and Pentecost marks the beginning of that.
2. There is much that can be said about the Holy Spirit. He is the third person of the Trinity, is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Son, and has a number of responsibilities for his role in the godhead. I couldn't fit all of that into one sermon, so I am not going to try. There are some pretty significant roles that the Holy Spirit plays that I will point out.
 - a. He is the inspiration of the scriptures, giving words to the Prophets and Apostles. He calls us to repentance and regenerates our hearts so that we can turn to the Father. He provides the power of new life and transformation within the believer.

He provides us each with gifts for service in the kingdom. And he empowers the Word to be effective.

3. It is this last point that is important in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit empowers the Word to be effective. What does that mean? It means that preaching the gospel isn't just about the right words. It isn't about putting together the perfect sermon, the right three-point evangelism tool, or having a great diagram and delivery when talking to non-believers. The effectiveness of any gospel endeavor comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.
4. This is played out remarkably in Acts 2. Jews are gathered from all over, and those Jews had many different native tongues. It is kind of like being Italian- my grandfather was from Sicily, but I don't know a lick of Italian. I can't speak it. Similarly, these Jews were descendants of Jews who had set up lives in other parts of the empire or neighboring lands, and while they maintained Jewish customs, Hebrew or Aramaic were not their languages.
5. God, wanting the celebration of the harvest to be the dawn of a new harvest, sent his Holy Spirit upon the apostles, empowering them to effectively preach the gospel by empowering their words. He didn't just fill their words with transforming power; he transformed their words into the words of life that could be understood by each listener in their own native tongue. The result of this miraculous preaching? Mass conversion. Three thousand people heard and believed. Three thousand souls were saved. That is what the Holy Spirit does.
6. He gifts, he empowers for ministry, he saves souls. The Holy Spirit reaps a harvest of believers based on the preaching of the word, which he empowers us to do. On this Pentecost- this birthday of the Church, let us not squander the gift of the Holy Spirit by seeking gifts that glorify ourselves. Instead, remember the harvest- as Jesus says, it is plentiful, but the workers are few. Be faithful in sowing the word of God, trusting that the Spirit's power in you will bring a big harvest to the glory of our God.