

Day of Pentecost

Matthew 28:-20

Acts 2:1-4

A pastor started a new church in the Denver area and, as so often happens, her church quickly became every other church's little sister, getting all of their hand-me-downs. One year they received a beautiful set of paraments, the colored clothes that adorn many Lutheran church altars. The gift was perfectly timed because it was right before the celebration of Pentecost and they didn't have a set of paraments for the season.

They dug through the box and, sure enough, they found a red altar cloth, red being the color of Pentecost. It had an image of a descending dove representing the Holy Spirit, but upon closer inspection they discovered that the dove had completely crazy eyes and claws that looked like talons. The Holy Spirit pretty much looked like a raptor! "Wow," one of them said, "We can't use this one. It makes the Holy Spirit look downright dangerous."

To which their wise pastor replied, "Or perhaps that's the very reason we should use it."

Today we're celebrating Pentecost, one of the most important days of the Christian calendar. While it's often said that Pentecost is the day the church was born, I think it's more accurate to say that it's the day the church's mission began. The risen Jesus had told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until he sent to them the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus said that, through the Holy Spirit, they would receive power to be Jesus' witnesses throughout the world. I can't help but wonder what they thought Jesus meant, but I'm pretty sure that what actually happened was beyond their wildest imagination.

Pentecost was one of the three major festivals of the Jewish calendar, and an occasion for Jews from all over the region to gather in Jerusalem to thank God for the first fruits of the harvest. It was during this festival that the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem, just as Jesus had instructed. Three years earlier, John the Baptist had said that while he came to baptize people with

water, the Messiah would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

And that's just what happens. The Holy Spirit appears as flames and fills them, and they begin to speak in the languages of the religious pilgrims who have come to Jerusalem for Pentecost, presumably languages they have never spoken before. In other words, Jesus fulfilled his promise. The Spirit does come. The disciples are filled with power from the Holy Spirit, and they do become his witnesses. These once timid and fearful disciples boldly go out to proclaim the good news to people they had good reason to believe would be at least skeptical if not outright hostile to their message.

The story of the Day of Pentecost is such a great story, but we don't read it each year because it's a great story. We read it each year because **it's our story**. It tells us something remarkably important about who we are. **We are the church, called and empowered for a mission to the whole world**. Let me say that again: We are the church, called and empowered for a mission to the whole world. Let me break that down, to make sure we understand what it means for us.

First, **we are the church**. When I was child in Sunday school, I learned that "This is the church, and this is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people." Maybe you learned that little ditty, too, when you were younger. It's cute and it's fun. But it's not entirely true, and the subtle implications are damaging.

This is not the church. Nor is the building in which we sit. We are the church, all of us together, washed by grace, united by faith and the Holy Spirit. When we talk about the church we are talking about us – all of us –along with all believers around the globe. We are the church.

We are the church **called and empowered for a mission**. In our baptism we're called to "proclaim Christ in word and deed." Like those first disciples at Pentecost, we have been filled with the promised Holy Spirit. We've been called to a mission. By how we live and by what we say, we are to proclaim that the Kingdom of

God is at hand, and that God is working in this world, right here and right now, to bring restoration and reconciliation to all people.

We do that by speaking the truth in love about the reality of sin. We do that through acts of love and mercy. We do that by fighting injustice. We do that through generosity of heart, time, prayer and financial resources. We do that by giving our lives away for the sake of others, living like Jesus as the Spirit grants us grace.

We are the church, called and empowered for a mission **to the whole world**. Our mission is to the whole world. Sometimes our sinful nature wants to make the church something that is supposed to serve us, as if the focus of St. John's is primarily to serve our members. There are lots of ways in which we care for one another in this body of believers. But our higher calling is to give ourselves away for the sake of others.

Our mission is to the whole world. Just as those first disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news in ways that all people could hear, we're called to proclaim that same good news of God's saving love in ways that all people can hear, see and understand.

You see, we are a resurrected people in Christ. We are the church, called and empowered for a mission to the whole world. That's who we are, and that's what the church is supposed to be all about.

On this Day of Pentecost, I celebrate the many ways in which we, as a church, are in mission together. But what I'd really like is to hear from each of you – I'd love to hear the thoughts and ideas you have for how we as a church, called and empowered by the Holy Spirit, can work together in our mission to reach the whole world with the love of Christ.

So, send me an email, write me a note, text me, call me, message me, talk to me. And if I'm too scary, find one of the council members and tell them.

We are the church, called and empowered for a mission to the whole world. I don't know if the Holy Spirit has crazy eyes and claws, but I do know that the Holy Spirit isn't safe. The Spirit will

not let us dwell in comfort and complacency as long as God's mission needs to be accomplished. We live to do God's work with our hands. You and I are the church. You and I are called and empowered for a mission to the whole world. We are called to live mission.

So, what mission in this world might God be calling you to this week?

Prayer

God, you have made us a resurrected people in Christ and empowered us for a mission to the whole world. Help us to proclaim the good news in ways that everyone can hear, see and understand. Spirit of God, lead us away from comfort or complacency and send us in mission to the people who need your help the most, in Jesus' name. Amen.