

## PENTECOST 2010

### BREATHING LIFE INTO THE CHURCH

John 20:19 – 23 and Ezekiel 37:9 – 14

“...he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

In the 20th chapter of John’s Gospel we find what amounts to John’s version of Pentecost. This story of the gift of the Spirit to Jesus’ friends foreshadows the outpouring of the Spirit upon the whole church. On that glad Easter evening the risen Lord came bringing gifts to his followers, and two thousand years later we are gathered in the confident hope that the same Lord is still showering gifts upon us.

The first gift of Christ’s Spirit was JOY. John says, “The disciples were glad that they saw the Lord.” What an understatement! Christianity is a joyful faith, because we have a Spirit within us that the world cannot quench. In the Middle Ages when an invading army did come to attack a castle, they hardly ever tried to climb over the castle walls or break through the powerful stones. Instead, the invading army would simply encircle the castle and settle down to wait, hoping that the people in the castle would soon run out of water and food and be forced to surrender. But some castles were very hard to defeat because within their walls they had their own well. A castle with its own inner source of water could hold out a long time against an enemy.

The Christian life is like that. Our joy does not depend upon what happens around us; our joy is supplied from within by the presence of our Lord. And as long as the joy springs from within us, the world cannot break us!

But not only does Jesus bring joy to his disciples, he also brings peace. Within a few verses Jesus twice says to his followers, “Peace be with you.” We are reminded of the promise that Jesus had earlier made when he said, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, but a peace that cannot be taken away.”

The story goes that two painters were commissioned to paint scenes of perfect peace. One painter depicted a placid lake on a moonlit night. The other artist painted a violent storm, beating with terrible fury, upon a lonely, barren mountain. In the face of the mountain was a crack in the stone, as wide as your hand. Nestled in the cleft was a little bird...dry and safe and at peace. THAT is the peace of Christ. Christianity is not a cure-all for the frustrations of the average day. Christ does not always lift us above the storms of life; but HE DOES give us a place to nestle, he gives us a sense of peace in spite of the worst that the world can do. JOY. PEACE. And yet one more gift that John mentions: Jesus gave his disciples a mission to carry out. He said, “Even as the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

On almost any Sunday you can hear a recurring refrain in my preaching **THAT WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE, AND NOT BY ANYTHING THAT WE OURSELVES CAN DO.** Grace is an undeserved favor, a free gift. But there is another side to that coin. Once we accept God’s grace we take upon ourselves a responsibility. Grace and responsibility go hand in hand and cannot be separated. The same Jesus who said, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest,” also said, “Take my yoke upon you.” A yoke is a symbol of service and obedience. Grace and responsibility...invitation and command... the two sides of the coin of salvation.

So Jesus sent them out. What lay ahead of the disciples was suffering, persecution, privation and violent death. It was no easy task that Jesus laid upon the shoulders of the eleven. Nor is it an easy task today to speak a word of truth to an unbelieving world...but it is our task. It is the charge and the mission that Christ has placed in our hands.

But as hard as it is to speak for Christ, it is also a rewarding mission. If we are faithful we become partners with Christ. Our mission gives us a purpose in life, a goal and a direction. Everybody in the world spends their life on something. Some people spend their lives piling up possessions. Some people spend their lives grasping at one empty thrill after another. Many lives are spent far too cheaply. The gift of Christ is that we are allowed to spend our lives in his service. That may well be the most precious Pentecost gift of all.

As we conclude our Pentecost message for today let me ask you

- ~ Do you feel empowered for mission?
- ~ Are you experiencing peace in the midst of your fears and anxieties?
- ~ Do you know the joy of the Lord even when everything around you is falling apart?

Remember that Jesus promises to every believer the presence of the Holy Spirit. Yes, today Jesus wants to breathe the power of his Spirit on you, and you, and you, and me... so that we can carry out Christ's mission with joy and peace! Friends, let us renew our faith, and like wind and the flames of the first Pentecost, may God's Spirit fall afresh on each of us. Let us pray...

God of wind, fire, and breath; Spirit of strength and gentleness; give us the courage to carry out your mission. May the fire of godly passion burn in us, until we are compelled to work for justice, peace, mercy, and love. May the steady breath of Spirit enable us to see you also in the quiet places, to rest in your presence, and to show others your grace even as it is somehow lived out in our complicated living.

In the loving name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.