

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Whitsunday¹

The Rev'd Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.³

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew [SHOW] wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.⁵

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad,

the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites [**EE-lumb-ights**], and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia [**kap-pa-DOE-she-uh**], in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia [**FRIDGE-ee-uh**], and Pamphylia [**pam-FILL-ee-uh**], in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene [**sigh-REE-knee**], and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The Pentecost story is a familiar one, but I would like to begin with a story that comes a little later in the book of Acts.

There was a man of Samaria named Simon who was a sorcerer, a magician with a reputation as a man of great spiritual power. When he heard the preaching of Philip the Apostle, he became a believer and was baptized. But when he saw that the Holy Spirit was conveyed through the laying on of hands by the Apostles, he wanted that power for himself. So he offered the

Apostles money to give him the power to convey the Holy Spirit by laying hands on whomever he wished.

The Holy Spirit, however, is a corporate gift. He is never given to an individual as a personal possession for private use. So St. Peter responded in these words: “Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God through money. You have no part or stake in this matter because your heart is not right with God.”

The type of spirituality exhibited by Simon Magus is pagan rather than Christian. It is highly individualistic, very permissive and quite tolerant of deviant behavior. There is very little in the way of discipline and almost nothing in the way of judgment. It is also rampant in the modern world.

America is full of people who practice that kind of spirituality in the woods or at the beach or on the golf course or lying in bed on Sunday morning.

These modern pagans like to select what they will believe from a menu of religious teachings. They take from the Bible whatever they like and discard everything else. They do the same with other religions as well, in order to construct a customized religion, specifically suited to whatever they are comfortable with.

The modern pagan looks inside to discover his own spiritual nature. He does not wish to meet with a spiritual being who has authority over him, and he certainly does not seek a relationship with a God who makes demands and exercises judgment. He wants to define good and evil for himself and find justification within himself for whatever he judges to be good.

The pagan holy man tends to be something of a hermit, living alone and contemplating the mysteries of the universe in private. He pursues harmony with nature rather than harmony

with other people. He is concerned with his own salvation, or rather I should say with his own peace of mind.

That kind of spirituality is a very different from the spirituality we read about in Scripture. Biblical spirituality is a gift from God. It is not something we seek; it is something that comes to us. It comes as a mighty wind that cannot be contained, and like fire that consumes as well as enlightens. That kind of spirituality comes from God and leads us back to Him through Christ. The Holy Spirit is in fact the very breath of God, who proceeds from the Father and enables His Word to be heard and obeyed. The Spirit unites the persons of the Trinity, just as He unites the people upon whom He descends. Apart from Him, the Word of God is mute, and the Father remains hidden.

But the Word of God is not mute, and the Holy Spirit has not ceased to reveal the Father through The Son. He active in the world even as the world tries hard to ignore Him. He unites the faithful to Christ and consequently to each other in the threefold gifts of faith, hope, and love.

The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father to each of us at our baptism. He comes in response to the prayers of the Church, in the laying on of hands in Confirmation and in Ordination, and in the consecration of bread and wine. He comes in times of crisis to strengthen the faithful and empower those who are called to leadership. He comes to glorify Christ and incorporate people into His resurrection body. In the process of doing that, the Holy Spirit breaks down every barrier of language, race, class, and even ecclesiastical structure. The evidence of His presence and activity is the coming together of the Church to declare the wonderful works of God.

St. Paul says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” That means that whatever spiritual gift you have received is not really your personal property. If you have received the gift of healing, or of prophecy, or of

wisdom or any of the other numerous gifts that the Apostle catalogues in various places, you do not have the right to exercise that gift apart from the Church as a whole. Nor do you have the right to withhold that gift and refuse to exercise it for the good of all.

The gifts of the Spirit are distributed throughout the Church so that none can claim to be complete within himself. We are Christians collectively, and it is the Holy Spirit who binds us together in Christ and enables us both to hear and to speak the Word of God.

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

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St. Alban's Anglican Catholic Church
Richmond, Virginia

May 27, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Lesson for the Epistle for Mass on Whitsunday, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Joel 2:28-end (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ Acts 2:1-11 (KJV).

⁶ Acts 2:1-4 (RSV).