

PENTECOST SUNDAY

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We believe in Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. **God's work alone. Once and for all time.** We believe in Jesus Christ, risen victorious from the dead. **God's work alone, Once and for all time.** We believe in the Holy Spirit poured out on the disciples. And it is to be **God's continuous work in every believer** from then until Jesus Christ comes again.

Lord God, let thy word only be spoken, and thy word only heard. Amen.

The Dark Ages, from about the fifth century to the beginning of the eleventh century, was a time of cultural bleakness, especially after Rome had been sacked in 410 and 455 and the empire it represented destroyed. To make a 20th century American allusion, it was essentially a six hundred year Great Depression, when food was scarce, people lived hand-to-mouth, and Western Civilization barely hung by a thread. The one bright spot in the culture was the local cathedral, which was like a HOLY Roman Empire church-sponsored works project, something like those of President Franklin Roosevelt during our own Great Depression in the 1930's. This cathedral building work gave thousands of people skill training and jobs; and the cathedrals, which were built even in small towns, became the cultural, social and spiritual centers of life. We have not seen that phenomenon for the local church since the beginning of the 1960's. Something we long for, but can't figure out how to retrieve. Ironically, it was these centuries of Dark Ages that produced some of the most beautiful murals, sculpture, stained-glass windows, and pageantry, like grander Christmas pageants, and Good Friday pageants unlike the small versions of today – except for Oberammergau, of course. All of these things back then were very intentional ways, in a time of great illiteracy, to help to teach the stories of the faith. And it worked.

The cathedrals became centers of community life, the court-house for local lawmakers, a place where travelers could find a meal and safe lodging. On the outside, booths selling everything from flowers to sausage surrounded the cathedral, as they do in most European cities even today. The presence of a large, busy cathedral in the center of a village guaranteed a relatively stable economic base, and was the center of life for most people.

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The three greatest feasts of the Church are Easter, Pentecost and Christmas, in that order. And Pentecost was one of the great holidays celebrated in these cathedrals. In fact, many of them were actually designed and built with special consideration for this great festival. The great domed and vaulted ceilings, so richly painted, disguised a number of trap doors that were used expressly for Pentecost celebrations. During worship, some hapless parishioners would be drafted to climb up on the roof. Today we might want to send our sexton Homero up there, but I already know he would refuse, and tell me it was MY building, "I think, Padre, YOU should go up there." And I would immediately delegate to the Junior or Senior Warden. In any case, At the appropriate moment during the liturgy, they would release live doves through the trap doors, through the painted skies and clouds of the cathedral ceiling. These doves would come swooping down on the congregation as living symbols of the presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same moment, the choirboys were encouraged to make whooshing and drumming sounds, like a holy windstorm. In one tradition it was the congregation encouraged to scuff and slide their shoes back and forth on the ground to emulate the sound of Pentecost. Kind of like that stomping on Easter Vigil we did during the St. John "Chrysostom" Easter sermon. Then, finally, as the doves swooped and the wind sounds rose, the trap doors were again opened, and bushels of rose petals were showered upon the congregation, symbolizing tongues of flame falling upon the faithful below. I can tell you, though, there are no trap doors up there, not even skylights.

The holes through which this was done were called, "Holy Ghost holes." You can image the wonder and delight that an event like that would bring into the hard, drab lives of those medieval Christians! It would thrill us today.

Today, we don't have any holes in the ceiling like that. I suppose if we did something like that today, we'd have to use a laser display and some special audio-visual effects – a little "smoke and mirrors." Like when you heard the wind sound effects during the epistle today. It still would not create the same kind of impression – people are so used to having exciting entertainment experiences. Yet today, I think we need "Holy Ghost holes" more than ever. Not the kind that serve as props for a medieval worship experience, but openings and conduits through which God's Spirit can enter, permeate and revitalize people who are caught up in this violent, narcissistic, hedonistic, materialistic-oriented culture. We need Christians to serve as "Holy Ghost holes" – witnessing to the power of God's love in this world. We need Christians who are willing to be conduits of God's grace in a graceless world. This is what makes Pentecost different. The Incarnation we are to proclaim as God-With-Us, Emmanuel. Easter we are to continue to be witnesses to the Resurrection, and only believe it for ourselves

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upon death. But Pentecost is for the living. And the apostles clearly believed it was to reoccur for each new convert, and be renewed daily. You and I are to be the Holes for the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit.

On Pentecost, Peter and the other disciples were in the Upper Room when the Spirit descended upon them like flames of fire. Their first response was to go out into the market and proclaim the good news. The gift of the Spirit enabled them to cross over boundaries of ethnicity and race, so that each person in the marketplace could hear the Good News in a language that they could understand. Since that time, the church has continued to try to do that, although sometimes it has also approached its own obsolescence and death, captured and trapped in its own language and culture, unwilling or unable to proclaim the Good News in languages that others can understand.

Today we also face that challenge. Today, also, people need to hear the Gospel proclaimed in language they understand, and boundaries need to be crossed to do that. We need to proclaim it to those in our community that have not generally been a part of this church. We need to proclaim it in the context of a culture that knows little about the church, let alone the Episcopal Church and our Anglo-Catholic heritage, as well as to people who have grown up in the church. We need to proclaim it with loving deeds and words that enable people in our neighborhood to understand what God is trying to tell them through us. But it must not be in our own power. It must be with the power and strength and might and creativity and love through the Holy Spirit overflowing in us. God doesn't work without his people – he needs "Holy Spirit holes," to reach out to the community, and to the world that surrounds our community, with his love and grace.

Ask and you shall receive.

I know you will go from here thinking this week about being a "Holy Spirit hole." I don't want you to simply envision yourself as a conduit through which the Spirit passes to proclaim God's love to the world. Not just as a holy trap door, through which tongues of the Spirit's fire descend upon our community. First I want you to do what the apostles expected: pray for your own Pentecost, and Pentecost upon our parish. And then pray for the Lord to lead you to one individual that you can touch, in some way, with the grace of God this week. And when you get that name, of course, go do it.

That is the excitement of Pentecost. 120 disciples, men and women, fearful, yet obedient in prayer and expectation as Jesus told them to be. Then suddenly there

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was the sound of a roaring wind, and flames of fire danced over their heads, and the Spirit descended upon them. And the world has never been the same since.

May you be filled with that same Spirit. Our church, our community, our world needs it more than ever!

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