

Preacher: Ruth Preston Schilk

Date: May 31, 2009 Pentecost Sunday (Baptisms and Communion)

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-20

Sermon: *Baptism: Walking Wet*

Today is Pentecost Sunday, hardly a “Hallmark occasion” by worldly standards, yet one of importance in the church calendar. Today the Christian church **world-wide** remembers the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon 120 of the disciples of Jesus who, after His ascension, had gathered together in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. This Jewish festival was also called the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Deut. 16:10), in commemoration of the completion of the barley and wheat harvests.

“People assembled in Jerusalem for this feast came from various Roman provinces representing a variety of languages. They were astonished to hear the disciples speaking of God’s works in their own languages” [Cecil B. Murphey, *Dictionary of Biblical Literacy*, (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1989), p. 126].

The book of Acts records Peter explaining that this is possible because of the fulfilment of God’s prophecies -- that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on everyone, and that Jesus, whose fellow Jews crucified him and whom God raised from the dead, is Lord and Messiah.

When Peter concluded his speech to the crowd, scripture says, *“they were cut to the heart” and asked “what should we do?” Peter told them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers* (Acts 2:37-42). The work of the church had begun.

Oh, to be such a powerful and effective preacher as to affect 3,000

people! But it was not Peter nor his preaching that was responsible for the outcome. Rather it was the **Holy Spirit** working through Peter's words and in the receptive hearts of the listeners that was powerful and effective.

When we celebrate Jesus' birth, mourn his death, and rejoice at his resurrection, we can picture **tangible** things associated with those events:
–a manger as a crib for the baby Jesus;
–a cross upon which Jesus died;
–folded grave clothes and an empty tomb from which Jesus rose to life.

But the Holy Spirit, unlike God embodied in flesh and blood, is **intangible**, **un**-holdable. When those disciples were all gathered together in one place on the day of Pentecost, suddenly, from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind that filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

How can one **hold** the wind? How can one **grasp** onto fire? In a way, these signs of the Holy Spirit don't have to be explained, merely understood that they were visible signs of an **invisible** reality. They witnessed to the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit which prompted followers of Christ to proclaim God's deeds of power.

In many respects, we re-enact, or experience our very own "day of Pentecost" at every baptism. We can expect great things to happen when Christians are gathered together in one place, yet the Holy Spirit has been at work in us in both great and small ways before we gathered here this morning. As the angel at the empty tomb told the women, "Jesus is **going ahead** of you to Galilee; there you will see him" (Matt. 28: 7). Christ and the Holy Spirit **have** gone ahead of us. Today, we'll hear how they have been at work in the lives of Justina and Susie in the events leading

up to this day and this time of worship. We look forward to their testimonies, so that we can **join** them in praising our Saviour.

The act of baptism also offers us a visible sign of an *invisible* reality. The water symbolizes a washing away of sin by Christ's death and resurrection. The pouring of the water reminds us of the generous pouring out of God's Holy Spirit. Rising up after being baptized reminds us that we are risen with Christ to new life in him and with a commitment to walk in His way.

The church is commanded to baptize, for Jesus said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 18:18-20)

“When something is done under the authority of, at the command of, in the name of, and with the promise of someone else, then that someone else, in this case God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the one doing the action. God commands the Church to baptize and promises to act where the Church so baptizes.

The church is the servant, the instrument of this baptizing God. We, the congregation, including family, friends, and mentors commit ourselves to support the newly baptized ones in their new life as a **Christian disciple**” [Richard A. Jespersen, *I Am Baptized*, (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing, 2000), p. 9].

What about the ones being baptized, what of their role? and *our* role too as ones **already** baptized? How does a baptized person leave this building today and *live differently*? I came across a description recently by author Richard Jespersen who says that “to live baptized is to walk wet.”

I've instructed Dennis who will be assisting me, to pour lots of water into my hands which I will release onto Susie's and Justina's head. I want them to know they've been baptized! Yet, in spite of a thorough wetting, I know they will be handed a towel, and likely by the end of lunch, all traces of the physical act of baptism will have dried up. How then, is a baptized person to "walk wet?"

If you have read Charles Schultz' comic strip *Peanuts* over time, you will have encountered the character Pigpen. He is a boy who seems to never have met soap and water. Every time he walks, clouds of dust and dirt accompany his every move.

Unlike Pigpen, people won't notice us moving about because of some physical reason or habit, like actually being soaking wet every day, but they will notice that we walk differently and our lives are lived differently as a result of being baptized because. Hopefully we will splash upon those around us because:

–Walking wet means to forgive as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:30-32);

–Walking wet means to live daily turning from sin to live for God (Rom. 6:6-11);

–Walking wet means to learn to love others as we have been loved and declare the good news of God's love to the whole world (John 15:12);

–Walking wet means living in the power of the Holy Spirit, equipped to serve Christ's church and the Kingdom of God.

–Walking wet means live out what God desires to do in us and through us, for the glory of God, through Jesus our Lord.

We do this one step at a time. And remember, Christ is with you always, to the end of the age. Amen.