



## Come Holy Spirit, Send Us Forth into the World

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek  
Pentecost Sunday, Year C  
June 9, 2019

For the past three months we have been on a journey of faith. Every year the church calendar leads us from Lent, through Holy Week, to Easter and beyond.

Lent takes us on a journey through the desert following Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem. It is a time of penitence and reflection. It calls us to reexamine our lives and reorganize our priorities because, after all, “we are dust and to dust we shall return.” This season reminds us that we need to take our time in this life seriously because it is temporary and fleeting.

Holy Week is a time of trial, of remembering Jesus’ final days with the Last Supper, the arrest in the garden, the false witnesses in the night, and the scourging that was to be enough but it wasn’t. We followed along in the story and came together to remember Jesus’ passion and crucifixion then we mourned and waited to see what would happen next.

Easter brought the stories and celebration of the Resurrection – an event so important that we celebrated not just one day, but throughout the season of Easter, the Great 50 Days. During those 50 days we read from the book of the Acts of the Apostles and learned about the earliest followers of the Jesus Movement. We learned how the faith spread beyond the witness of the apostles and outside the limits of the Holy Lands. We watched as this budding religion, a branch of ancient Judaism, grew to become more than the center of life for one faithful, chosen nation. It became a faith that extends to all, throughout the world.

On the fortieth day after the Resurrection, we remembered the Ascension – Jesus return to the take his seat at the right hand of the Father. Last week we read from Acts, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

And, finally, today we have Pentecost. The word Pentecost means 50 or 50<sup>th</sup> day. Today is the 50<sup>th</sup> day since the Resurrection.

In this morning's sermon we will learn about the ancient Jewish celebration of Pentecost. We'll look at some similarities between the Pentecost Jesus and his family, going back for generations, came to Jerusalem every year to celebrate and the Pentecost experienced by the disciples and earliest followers of Jesus – the Pentecost we, generations later, still celebrate today. We will renew our baptismal vows aligning our faith with the thousands of people who came to believe and were baptized that day. And we'll recommit our selves as today's disciples of the continuing Jesus Movement.

There were a great many people in Jerusalem that day. There were, "devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem." And a great many others were there as well. "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind" and it filled the entire house where the disciples were sitting. Then, "divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability." When they heard the sound, a crowd gathered and were bewildered because each heard their own language being spoken and God's deeds of power being proclaimed.

Why was the city so full of people that day? They were there because it was Pentecost, the 50<sup>th</sup> day after the Passover. The Jewish Pentecost, also known as the Feast of

Weeks was one of three “solemn feasts” that all able-bodied Jewish males were required to travel to Jerusalem to attend. It was exactly 50 days after the Feast of First Fruits and exactly 50 days after the Passover. On this day, devout Jews gathered in this holy place to celebrate the giving of the Ten Commandments, the sealing of the Old Covenant on Mount Sinai.

Our Christian Pentecost story, and the one of rabbinic tradition have some interesting parallels. It is said that when the law was received at Sinai, the Ten Commandments were given with a single sound, yet when the voice went forth it was divided in to seven voices and then seventy tongues, so that “every people received the law in their own language.” The notion of seventy languages is interpreted to represent all the nations of the world. These sound waves from the mouth of the Lord were visualized as a fiery substance.

Isn't it interesting how much that sounds like what happened on the Christian day of Pentecost?

On this day we remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit which is represented in our service today by the presence of the dove. Today we end our 3 ½ month journey of faith that began with Ash Wednesday and so I wonder, did we accomplish what we set out to do?

The point of remembering all this, of going through the story so carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully is to give ourselves the opportunity to learn new things; to be inspired in the things we remember and the things we had never realized before. It's a chance to renew our faith and find ourselves strengthened, enlivened and ready for the journey ahead.

And so, I ask you, how was the journey for you? How is your relationship with God? Did you learn new things along the way? Do you find yourself strengthened and renewed? I hope so, because we have work to do.

The Spirit has now come to fill us with God's vision, God's hope in the world. The Spirit brings for us inspiration, a great well from which we can draw ideas on how we are being called to serve the world. The Spirit is also here to nourish and sustain us as we continue on the way.

We are the continuing people of the Jesus movement. We are on a journey of faith, dedicated to serving God in the name of Jesus Christ. We seek to feed the hungry, help the poor, visit the sick, support the faithful, share our stories, and bring health and life and love to the world. We seek to bring light where there is darkness and hope where there is despair. Along the way we will meet and encourage many people. Sometimes we will share our faith with words, other times it will be our actions that speak the story of our faith for us.

I don't know what all will happen or where we will travel next on our journey. What I do know is that the God who creates us, redeems us and sustains us will be with us wherever we go even to the end of the age.

Let us remember Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Let us celebrate the birthday of the church and the over 130 years that St. Paul's has been faithful here in Ventura, constantly serving the Lord. Then, let us go forth armed with love and sustained by the Holy Spirit to keep the faith for Christ's sake. Amen.