

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday May 23, 2010**

**PENTECOST C**

In the name of our one living God who creates abundantly, loves extravagantly and sustains eternally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's readings remind us that when God acts, God is no piker – God acts **BIG!** One thing Jesus teaches us is that when God acts, God isn't stingy! Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes what happened when Jesus fulfilled his promise to send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who would remind the Apostles of what Jesus said and did and would enable them to do even more. Did you notice that the experience is described in terms of being "like" something else: a noise *like the rush of a violent wind*, divided tongue *as if of fire*. What happened was the coming of the Holy Spirit and it was beyond anyone's experience; words couldn't describe it. It was so huge that not only did it fill the entire house but it spilled out into the streets. Pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem from all parts of the world for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, a harvest feast of thanksgiving, heard the Apostles speaking and could understand them in their own languages.

"What could this be? What could this mean?" many asked. Others sneered and said they were drunk. Peter declares that they are not drunk and quotes from the Prophet Joel that when God's kingdom arrives God will pour out his Spirit on all and **anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**. God is doing something new and amazing! The followers of Jesus were speaking in different tongues and all those on the streets could understand. Language no longer divided them. People from different

cultures could understand each other. All barriers are broken down! If anything, this was what Jesus was about! At that moment a single new community was created and all nations could see and hear of how Jesus offers the world a new and better life!

Up until then the Bible tells us of people separating from themselves and being afraid of and hostile to one another. People and nations were always trying to “be better than” one another, always trying to have more. Each of the nations had their own god or gods who took care only of them. When people have a god that is limited to their own particular group, the truth is that God is probably not at the center of their community; rather, they have put themselves at the center. Now this is all being undone. Jesus has shown a new way and the Spirit is given to lead Jesus’ followers into this new life to create a new and better world.

Pentecost teaches us another of the great truths of the Christian faith – that we are **all**, each and every one of us, created to be **children of God**. I teach this truth each Wednesday morning when I do chapel here with the children from the preschool. I ask them where they are and they say, “Chapel.” I ask them whose house is chapel and they reply, “God’s”. I ask them that if chapel is God’s house, who else’s house is it? They reply loudly. “Everybody’s!” I then remind them that since God created everybody, everybody is special and God loves everybody. I am hoping that by hearing this so often it will stick with them for the rest of their lives.

Our readings from the Gospel of John and the letter to the Romans carry this truth forward. They remind us that through Jesus God has adopted us as God’s children. I try to tell the little ones this by asking them why do we say “Our Father” instead of “My Father”? Adoption is voluntary and intentional. We choose to adopt, it isn’t imposed upon us. Adoption is

relational. There is an element of freedom in this. There has to be. Love doesn't impose itself on another and one cannot be compelled to love. Paul and John each tell us that God chooses to love us and invites us to be God's own child, make no mistake about that. But we have the freedom to accept that invitation – or not! The question posed to all of us is: Do we want to be in relationship with God or do we want to put ourselves first?

In John's Gospel Jesus tells us how to accept God's invitation – by loving one another as Jesus loved us and by following what Jesus taught and did – to speak the truth and to do no injustices. Jesus promises us that this is the way to peace - Jesus' kind of peace not the kind the world gives us.

When Jesus came, he found a world that was full of falsehoods, myths and violence because the world was full of injustices. It seems that when we create our own human groups, it seems that someone always gets left out. That one becomes an enemy or a threat. From this hostility and fear arise a mentality that creates injustice and provokes violence. We define ourselves over and against the other person or group and we fight rather than cooperate. All of this gives us not only a distorted image of the one excluded but it gives us a distorted image of ourselves. There is no peace in a world like that. Jesus teaches us a way out of that world but it seems that people would prefer the delusion that they can do it on their own rather than rely on God.

Today we celebrate a day when the scales fell from people's eyes and their ears became unplugged. It was a day when, no matter what their language, they actually heard one another and understood what the other was saying. It was a day when they could look through exterior differences and see that each of them was a beloved child of God. In short, the Kingdom of God became visible and there was peace in their hearts.

The Spirit of God is still upon us but we get to choose whether we will respond. Humanity has always struggled with the tension between unity and diversity. A quick look at just very recent history shows that violence arises when religious, racial, ethnic or other differences or orientations blind us from seeing our common humanity and that God freely loves all of us. The Sudan, Bosnia, the Middle East, Rwanda come immediately to mind and there are many more. The Church is not immune from this. It too can put itself at the center rather than God and become a source of discord and even violence rather than peace. We see this even here in Hawai'i today.

However, when things look bad and peace impossible it always seems that Holy Spirit shows up. Today is often spoken of as the Church's birthday. Jesus didn't leave books or a well functioning organization to start the church. No he left a pile of rags and sandals at the foot of a cross and a bunch of fisherman and other hardworking people as his followers – almost all of whom had deserted him when he was arrested. But he left the most precious gifts possible – the Holy Spirit and the promise that He would be with us to the end of time. From that came the Church that although persecuted and reviled for its first 300 years, overcame the power and injustice of the largest Empire on earth. Think about St. Francis who reformed the church, William Wiberforce the repentant slaver who worked to abolish slavery in England long before we did. Think about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fr. Damien and Mother Maryanne of Moloka'i.

These are examples of the power of God that God wants to pour into our hearts. Remember what Jesus said; we can do even greater things than we thought possible working with the power of the Spirit.

Amen