



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost (B)

Great Affection

[RCL] Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:25-35, 37; Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21;
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Let us pray an invocation of the Holy Spirit by John Henry Newman:

Come, O Holy Spirit.

Come as Holy Fire and burn in us,
come as Holy Wind and cleanse us within,
come as Holy Light and lead us *in* the darkness,
come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,
come as Holy Power and enable our weakness,
come as Holy Life and dwell in us.

Convict us, convert us, consecrate us,
until we are set free from the service of ourselves,
to be your servants to the world. Amen.

There is nowhere you can go that God is not. Think about that: There is nowhere you can go that God is not. This may seem like a no-brainer, but how often do we feel like this is false, even though our scriptures teach us again and again that it is true? “There is nowhere you can go that God is not” is a good reminder for this Day of Pentecost. This feast day marks the official birth of the Church and the explicit mission of the Holy Spirit—for us to tell the world about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Robin Greenwood, author of several books about mission and ministry, puts it this way, “The Church of God then, does not have a mission, but the God of mission has a church.” This is our job as Christians. We are going to places that God already is—the past, the present, and the future—and God is using us to get across the message that each person on this planet is loved beyond our limited understanding. In the nineteenth century, especially in the Deep South, people would not say that they were “born again.” Instead, as author Brennan Manning notes, they would describe their personal relationship with Jesus thus: “I was seized by the power of a great affection.” Manning goes on to say, “It was a profoundly moving way to indicate both the initiative of the almighty God and the explosion within the human heart when Jesus becomes Lord. Seized by the power of great affection was a visceral description of the phenomenon of Pentecost, authentic conversion, and the release of the Holy Spirit.”

This is the day where the power of our great affection brings forth God’s mission—that “release of the Holy Spirit” Manning describes. This evokes energy pent up, like a runner finally being able to speed off from the starting line or an arrow released from its bow. When we do something in the name of Jesus, great power is unleashed. We are to be flung out across our communities, the nation, and the world with the release of the Holy Spirit, like God’s glitter—mingling and sparkling amongst ordinary life to show that God’s love is not so ordinary, but something radical and life-changing. We are to be those trick candles on a birthday cake that, when the world thinks it has blown us out, we come back to shine the light of Christ anew. Think about this: What are some ministries in your faith community where the God of mission is working through you as a church? Where do you see yourselves as God’s glitter? How is your community’s light of Christ resilient in the face of the world around you? If someone were to stop at the gas station for directions to your church, how would the cashier fill in this sentence: “Oh, yes! That’s the church that...”?

We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the world. We affirm this during our renewal of baptismal vows when we answer the questions: “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” To this, we answer, “We will, with God’s help.”

When the Spirit moves in our own lives, one of the immediate reactions is to be perplexed, like some of the people in our story from Acts were. Another reaction is to sneer in disbelief at what is happening, much like some of the other people. Our human minds cannot wrap themselves around what God is doing, even if we are in the midst of God’s action ourselves, just like those in the crowd. And isn’t that still true in this day and age? We want to put God in a box. We want a nice, neat, tidy God that we can understand, tied with a bow—but God doesn’t work that way. The Holy Spirit blows where it will and, like a woman in the middle of labor, we cannot deny it and we can’t stop it. Sometimes it makes us perplexed. Sometimes it makes us uncomfortable. But always, *always* the Spirit is pouring out to proclaim God’s glory in the world and it is moving through us so that God’s glory will be revealed. God comes alongside us speaking our language, healing and inspiring us so that we can share God’s love with someone else in their own language. This is the Good News!

How has the Holy Spirit blown like the wind in your life? We’ve all had our moments. Moments where God has sent the Holy Spirit sounding like a violent wind in our lives, upsetting things, moving things, changing things—and we all know how human beings hate change. Yet we can take a page from the disciples’ story and remember that we should always be prepared for God. Be prepared to receive the vivid experience of the Holy Spirit—over and over and over again. God is always doing something new.

We continue, with God’s help, through the Holy Spirit and in Jesus’ name to spread the wildfire of God’s love in our broken, hurting world. This is our commission. This is our faith. This is what it means to be a new creation in Jesus Christ. This is Pentecost, the birth of the Church—and we are that Church. So, let

the Holy Spirit come to us anew as we go forth with fire in our hearts, as the poet and pastor, Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote:

Holy Spirit,
River of love, divine delight,
flow through me.
Flame of sun, burn in me.
Wind of heaven, breathe in me.
Tongues of strangers, speak in me.
Love of God, sing in me.

Lead me beyond myself,
to return to you in the other,
to love you in my stranger,
my foreigner, my enemy.

Burn with your fire in me,
that it may be mine.
Breathe yourself into my life,
that it may be yours.
I am your song, and your singing.
I am your candle; you are my flame.

Holy Spirit,
love the world
in me.

It is our new birth that we are celebrating today. Happy Birthday to you—you are the Church for God's mission. There is nowhere you can go where God is not. Go out and live the Spirit-filled life we celebrate!
AMEN.

The Rev. Danée Ashley is an Episcopal priest and licensed marriage and family therapist who has ministered with parishes in North Carolina, New York, Minnesota, and the Seattle area and is a therapist at Soul Spa Seattle, LLC (www.soulspaseattle.com). Danée uses art, music, drama, poetry, and movement in counseling, spiritual direction, and creation of ritual. She has written for Working Preacher, Luther Seminary's Faith+Lead, Sermons That Work, and other publications, as well as being a contributor to podcasts, books, and producing a play about fertility struggle. Danée's favorite pastimes include reading, traveling with her husband, making sure their rescue dog Cooper is living his best life, dancing with wild abandon to Celtic music, and serious karaoke.