

Christ Church *Sermons*

The Day of Pentecost, May 11, 2008
The Reverend Dr. Winston B. Charles

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35, 37b; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

Happy Mothers Day! On this day we give thanks for mothers – for our own mothers and grandmothers, for the mothers of our children, for our friends’ mothers who loved us as their own children. Take a moment and think of the mothers in your lives, how they gave or give of themselves in order that their children and others might grasp the wholeness of who God created them to be. Their love reflects the very love of God. Thanks be to God for the precious gift of mothers. Let the congregation say, “Amen!”

I quipped this past week that I knew we would have a great congregation to celebrate the Feast Day of Pentecost because it was also Mothers Day! A double feast day!

This morning’s first reading from Acts relates Luke’s account of the coming of God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Christ, upon the disciples and their sending-forth. But, to appreciate Luke’s account appropriately one must at least return to his telling of the Ascension ten days earlier. After the resurrection, the Risen Christ appeared to the disciples on a number of occasions: to Mary, who ran to tell the other disciples, to Thomas, who doubted, to the two on the road to Emmaus, who knew Jesus in the breaking of the bread, to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, whom Jesus told, “Feed my sheep,” and to others.

Forty days after Easter, Jesus – the Risen Christ – speaks to the disciples one last time, “Wait for the promise of the Father. Do not leave Jerusalem. The power of God’s Holy Spirit will come upon you and raise up within you. You will be witnesses of the Gospel in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to ends of the earth.”

Then, the Risen Christ arose into heaven, into that different state of being that is fully in the full presence of God. As the disciples stood gaping into heaven, gaping with mouths wide open, two “men in white robes” – angels – came to them and said, “What are you looking at? Why are you gaping toward heaven? Look to the world. Shift your eyes from up there to down here. Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the power of God’s Holy Spirit to come to you.”

The Apostles with the women disciples, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’s brothers did just that, stayed in Jerusalem waiting on the Spirit, devoting themselves to prayer.

Now, on this Day of Pentecost, the ten days of prayerful waiting, the ten days of hopeful anticipation, the ten days of contemplative preparation have come to an end. As they are gathered together as a community, The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Spirit of Jesus comes among them and rises up within in them so that their hearts burn with the fire of God's love and they are prepared to go forth to proclaim in word and deed the Good News of the radical love of God in order that others might know this love and find hope, healing and meaning for their lives.

These disciples, moved outward by the Holy Spirit, stepped out of their place of receptivity, stepped out of their comfort zone, and began to tell others of the radical love of God.

As Luke reports it, Jews from all nations, gathered in Jerusalem for a major Jewish feast, miraculously hear the disciples speaking in their own native languages, which is a way of saying that when the Love of God is proclaimed in the right way, it is for all people; it brings life to all people.

These men and women who followed Jesus to the end and received the gift of God's Holy Spirit that joined with their spirits stepped out of their room into this room, into this sacred space of Christ Church, for we are direct spiritual descendents of the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to the followers of Jesus in a new way and they began to share the Good News of God's love with others who shared it with others who shared it with others who shared it with us.

The Day of Pentecost is here and now, for that same Spirit of the Risen Christ is here in our hearts and in our midst, in Luke's account of Ascension and Pentecost, in the hymns we sing and the prayers we say, in the breaking of the bread and the baptizing of Charlotte Elizabeth Brooks and Isabelle Mae Adelle Fisher.

I grew up in the Star Wars era – not those three prequels, but the true trilogy of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *The Revenge of the Jedi*. My mind has been warped ever since. In *Star Wars*, George Lucas provided us with a most helpful insight into understanding the evangelist Luke's account of Ascension and Pentecost.

For the uninitiated among us who have yet to travel to a planet far away, George Lucas's fantasy takes us to a world at war; the forces of evil and forces of good are in deadly conflict. On the good side, a young Luke Skywalker is mentored by a wise and aging Jedi Knight, Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi. Obi-Wan takes Luke under his arm because he knows that Luke has been born for a special purpose in overcoming the evil force that rules the world with such brutality. The Dark Side's main man Darth Vada, a fallen angel – oh, I mean a fallen Jedi Knight, now

serves the Evil Powers. Darth Vada is actually Luke Skywalker's father, but this we do not yet know.

When Luke and Obi-Wan invade the Dark Power's fortress, Obi-Wan and Darth Veda engage in a brutal fight with light sabers. Suddenly, as Obi-Wan looks knowingly over to Luke, he drops his arms and allows Darth Veda to kill him with the light saber. Luke is devastated with confusion and grief, but manages to escape and continue the battle.

The Jedi Knights raise one final assault on the Death Star, an advanced space ship that is close to destroying the forces of good. Along with others, Luke tries to shoot a missile into the one vulnerable spot of the Death Star. Using all the advanced technology of his star ship, Luke misses and misses again. One last pass: then, from deep within Luke comes the voice of Obi-Wan Kenobi: Don't rely on technology, Luke; trust the force. Trust the force within. Luke, listening to the inner voice of his mentor, disconnects from the technology, closes his eyes, trusts the force, and, of course, wins the day.

Now I am certainly not saying that George Lucas has intentionally created a parable for the Christian Faith as C.S. Lewis and Tolkien did, but his story does present a powerful insight into the Evangelist Luke's Gospel accounts of Ascension and Pentecost. God in Christ Jesus has given completely even unto death so that we might know healing and wholeness, calling and purpose, life and joy in their fullness. The Risen Christ appeared to the disciples on this earth, but finally went away into that other dimension of being, which we call heaven, so that the Spirit of the Risen Christ might come to each and every one of us from within, drawing us to ourselves, our authentic selves.

Here is the power of Pentecost: God is present here and now in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we might know our true selves, be our authentic selves, live into the fullness of who God created us to be.

Part of that fullness is that God claims us and calls us into ministry, just like the apostles. We have a particular calling from God to be the Good News of Christ in the world in a way that is uniquely congruent to who we are. If we want to know the fullness of life, we need discover what that calling is and be claimed by it.

It may be one's profession or one's avocation, working on behalf of children and young people, for peace and justice, =for healing and wholeness, for housing and health, for inclusion and understanding, for joy and celebration. It may be being a mother – or a father, sister, brother, friend.

One thing is absolutely certain: You have a purpose in this life. That purpose is given to you by our loving God. It is something that no one

else in all the world can do. If you do not do it, it will not be done. It is part of your uniqueness, your specialness, your reason for being on this earth, your doorway to joy. It is part of God's redeeming work for this world. To discern that purpose and to follow it will give you a depth of joy unexpected that will last even beyond death. Not to know it or follow it shortchanges both you and the world, and saddens the heart of God.

The disciples were never the same after the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ came upon them and they discovered and claimed their unique call.

On this Day of Pentecost, may this be our prayer:

Open our hearts, O God of the Risen Christ, to know the fullness of our earthly life and the uniqueness of your claim and call for us; grant us the Holy Spirit that we may join that wondrous multitude of saints who have known you, loved you, and served you. Enable us to be an ongoing incarnation of your loving presence in the world.

With Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi in your thoughts, there is only one way to conclude this Pentecost prayer:

May the Force be with you!