

## PENTECOST SUNDAY

June 9, 2019

Text: John 14:8-17

Title: Greater Works

Last Sunday afternoon we hosted the Baccalaureate service for all the graduating seniors from McLean High School. Clergy from different faith traditions joined school administrators to offer them words of advice and to bless them as they prepare for new adventures. Each speech was encouraging. Everyone was told to seek happiness while they pursue their dreams. Everyone was reminded that they would have to work hard to get what they wanted in life. All they had to do was stay focused and never give up on their goals.

No matter how old we are we all seem to strive for the same thing. We want to lead a good life and we certainly want the next generation to have an even better life. I listen with amazement at our college students and the opportunities they have to study abroad. Our world is so accessible to them and it opens up so many doors for them once they are out of college. By then we want them to get lucrative jobs. We want them to have a good enough income that allows them to pay down their school debts and still have enough money saved for a down payment on a first home.

I drive through McLean on my way to the church, and I see a significant number of houses being knocked down. All are replaced by houses that are taller than the neighboring trees and wide enough to park three or four cars in the garage. People who have stable careers and who worked long hours for a significant number of years will move into those homes. It is the good life, a better life.

In John 10:10 Jesus said –

*I came that people may have life, and have it abundantly.*

I am sure that when Jesus spoke those words he was not talking about the *good life* as we have come to understand it. Jesus is not promising us that he will be the means by which we acquire everything we ever wanted. However, in his ministry he does develop an understanding of life that is worthy of our study. It will put into context what it means to find happiness and what it means to pursue dreams.

For the last three Sundays we have been listening to this exchange Jesus had with his disciples before his departure. In the extended discourse, he is trying really hard to calm their fears. He says to them

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.  
I will not leave you orphaned.*

Then Jesus does this strange thing and tells them that it is to their advantage that he leaves them. And his disciples listen to this with disbelief. Over the past three years they had Jesus with them twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Life was never better and they could not imagine life without him.

So Jesus explained what he meant. When Jesus departed from this world then it would be time for him to send the Holy Spirit. Even though they did not comprehend how the Holy Spirit would function, Jesus assured them that it would help them in the next phase of their faith journey. Still perplexed they waited and waited for 50 whole days. But the day finally arrived! And the Spirit finally arrived!

It may not be Christmas and it may not be Easter but we should be celebrating this day with just as much joy and zeal in our hearts as we do those other high, holy days. Acts 2 is an epic chapter in the Bible because everything the disciples knew and believed about Jesus changed on this day. They finally understood those words of Jesus because they experienced his Spirit. On this day God through Christ changed and flipped it around so that the God with us (that we hear at Christmas) and the God for us (that we hear at Easter) is now Christ within us.

What we celebrate today is that God through Christ lives inside of us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Life (the good life) (the better life) is now defined as a reflection of the Christ within us. Christ is always present to guide us and direct us and help us and comfort us. And we (as the church) are to position ourselves for the work of the Holy Spirit. We (as the church) are our best when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is an unstoppable force. We may not hear the rush of a violent wind or we may not see divided tongues of fire rest on our heads but we are to become so aware of the different ways that God shows up here at Redeemer that we stand in awe of him.

For those of us who were able to attend the 11 am service last week the Holy Spirit moved this church unlike any experience we have had here in my time with you (and there have been many). It was for me a wonderful metaphor of what God intended for us as the church – a blend of sounds that came from different voices and different instruments to form an incredible, cohesive praise to God. Everyone in our choir and those who accompanied them used their individual gifts and worked together to make it sound as one.

How could that be? It is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Why do we come together each week as a community of faith? It is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Life is too hard when we do it alone. We are here as the church to help you carry your burdens and to celebrate with you when all is well. We (as the church) are our very best when we are together. We are our very best when we make the commitment to care, grow, and serve side-by-side with each other.

As soon as Peter heard about those who sneered in disbelief, he stood before them and he preached to them the gospel message. Peter could do that because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ was within him. He took everything he learned from Jesus and he did exactly what we are called to do . . . he told them the story.

On this day we are reminded that we are to be disciples and we are to make disciples. We are to be a community with a cause. We are to reach outward with his word and invite all the people in. Our purpose is to align ourselves with the mission of God. God has given us gifts and we are well equipped to use them. We are to live for the purpose of God, with the people of God, and by the power of God.

In John 14:12 Jesus told his disciples that when the Spirit swirls in their midst then they will do the same works that Jesus did and even greater works than these (the better life we wish for the next generation). I am not sure what greater works Jesus had in mind but he has opened the door for us to experience opportunities beyond our own hopes and dreams. I can think of no greater work than people living out the character of Jesus, doing the things he did, and relating to people with the same love that he showed all the way to the cross. I believe this is the point of Pentecost. I believe it is the call of the church.

Jesus came so people may have life and have it abundantly. Amen