

Sermon: 2021/05/23 (PENTECOST, Year B) - Acts 2:1-21 & John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15_BTR

Kids' Talk: An Exciting Visitor

[Invite children to the front.]

Have you met my dog, "Tootsie"? [Photo in a frame.]

She gets *very* excited when someone comes to the door - whether at home or here in the church office.

She jumps up and down; runs around and around *really* fast, and wags her tail. She gets *sooo*(!) excited, in fact, that she forgets to breathe properly and starts coughing and gasping (for air).

And though that's a bit extreme, who *doesn't* love when a visitor comes?

These days it usually means an Amazon delivery - *new stuff, yay!*

Well, about ten days after the Ascension, when the Apostles were having a meeting, suddenly the Holy Spirit came to visit them with *great* power:

He entered the room like a mini-tornado and gave to each one of them the ability to speak the languages of people from many different countries, guaranteeing that the "Goods News" - or, *Gospel* - of the empty tomb, the end of sin and the possibility of eternal life, would reach even faraway English-speakers like us!

Let's give thanks: Father God, we praise you for the miracle of Pentecost that meant the Gospel could be shared in a language we understand..., in Jesus' name, amen.

The Holy Spirit

Our theme today should be obvious:
the Holy Spirit, also called 'the Advocate'.

Member of the Trinity.

Divine person.

And, *specifically*, of course, our theme is His manifestation as 'a violent wind', seen rushing among the Apostles - and more exactly, you might say His *bestowal* on them.

Sent from Heaven - as promised, by the newly ascended Jesus.

But as anyone could tell you who knows the Bible well, this *isn't* the Spirit's *first* appearance.

Indeed, this isn't even the first time *Christ* had shared Him with the Twelve. Putting aside the fiery "FX," then - of this morning's episode, the *really* interesting question to ask of the Scriptures is, therefore, what's so *significant* about *this* occasion?

Was it truly *consequential* or does the Feast of Pentecost "make a mountain of a molehill."

[Pause.]

Well, what makes a gift *great*? (As opposed to mediocre.)

One of the criteria - maybe *the* preeminent one - is how often it can be used or enjoyed, right?

So, a cake is nice but a car is better - you can only eat the first thing once, and then it's used up; its exhausted, *extinguished*.

But the other thing - just as long as you haven't been conned by the salesman - keeps on giving, journey after journey, to beach vacations, to restaurants, to shops; church.

Yes, I think it is quite uncontroversial to say that the greatest gifts are the ones that keep *on* giving.

And I was going to say like, for example, a magazine subscription!

But that sounds rather lame.

So, help me out:

give me other examples of "great" gifts that keep on giving...

[Wait for response.]

Yes!

Or how about the "gift" of being married and in love?

That's an *extraordinary* thing, isn't it!

The gift of a spouse - of a *life*-partner - a companion 'in sickness and in health, 'til death us to part' - is a "gift" that doesn't end with the conclusion of the matrimonial ceremony.

You don't take home your bride or groom and put them on a shelf or in a cabinet to gather dust.

Every day, Christian marriage - being "one flesh" - continues to give to those in possession of that sacrament.

A cooked-meal.

A kiss.

A pay-cheque.

A smile.

And, likewise, the Holy Spirit is a gift that keeps on giving.

He doesn't come to us and fill us just once, and that's it: "job done."

But over and over again, and for *different* reasons; to fulfil different purposes.

As I've already said - at the beginning, the gift of the Spirit to Peter, James, Matthias and the others on Pentecost *wasn't* their initial encounter with Him: A few days prior - *forty*, to be precise, immediately after the Resurrection - the risen, triumphant Jesus, having entered the locked room by mysterious, supernatural means, 'breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ..."[Jn. 20:22]

And this incident shouldn't be confused or conflated with that under discussion in *Acts*.

They aren't one and same, but one of the authors has misremembered the sequence of events.

Not at all.

What is singular about the gift of the Spirit's presence on Pentecost is how He effected a miracle that empowered the Apostles to speak - *instantaneously* - languages foreign to them.

This was the key ingredient that would enable those not-especially-well-educated Galileans to actually 'go into all the world and make disciples of every nation' as they had been commanded.

It was the..."silver bullet."

The "secret sauce."

God doesn't just tell us what to do, He helps to make it happen Himself - *this* is the distinctive, world-changing "*servant-leadership*" that Jesus modelled - of "talking the talk" *and* "walking the walk."

Of not "lording it over" subordinates from afar but rather partnering with them "at the (same) coal-face."

On the earlier occasion, however, no such thing occurs.

The Spirit came to do something else *entirely*.

Something else *necessary*:
another miracle.

If you turn with me to *John* chapter twenty, we see it concerns being able to forgive sins.

And that's not *nearly* as (visually) spectacular - no indoor hurricanes or tongues of flame, but what a *hard*, seemingly impossible thing that is sometimes, right?

To *sincerely* "let bygones by bygones."

Such a thing is so rare!

- To say to a person who has *deeply* wounded or offended you:

"Let's be friends."

Imagine a world where people did that more - were *more* forgiving; didn't hold onto grudges or resentments.

In the Middle East, for example, as we're seeing:

Who fired first; who attacked whom?

About historical sins of slavery here in America.

And in our *personal* lives.

We *badly* need the Holy Spirit's help in this regard - to truly forgive.

(But that's another sermon.)

Yet even *John*-twenty isn't the *original* gift of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles.

We have to go even *further* back to at least *Luke* chapter ten:

now here, admittedly, He isn't mentioned *explicitly* but there's *no doubt* of His handiwork:

Jesus sent out the 'seventy-two' - a larger group of His followers beyond those He personally recruited, and they went to do evangelism among the northern villages, and when they came back they were full of excitement about the healings and the exorcisms they had performed in Christ's name, and He told them, by way of explanation: "'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy...'"

How?

It's unspoken at that juncture but we know the answer: *by* the Holy Spirit.

One could go on, but my point is a simple one:

I'll repeat it - the Holy Spirit is gift that keeps on giving.

Thus what we see (in the New Testament) is that the Apostles received - for lack of a better word - (multiple) "instalments" of the Holy Spirit, and each time it was to assist them to go beyond human weakness and human frailty to achieve distinct and separate Kingdom aims.

The Holy Spirit, in other words, didn't visit them once and then vanish.

He isn't a "one-trick-pony."

No.

He worked in them and through them in many wonderful, diverging ways.

And so He will for us *too*.

If, then, you feel you've missed out in some way - that the Holy Spirit hasn't powerfully transformed some area of your life and so that "area" isn't working to the Creator's glory and for the building of the Kingdom, I want to reassure you that that isn't "the end of the story."

That He will "come knocking" with a new miracle if you ask Him.

Amen.