

Good morning! I am thankful to see you all safely here. It's been quite a week in Connecticut, Texas and abroad! As we celebrate Pentecost today, if you are in a place of grieving, I invite you to simply receive God's comfort. Today we celebrate Pentecost; sometimes called the birthday of the church. On that day, almost 2000 years ago, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, so that each person gathered in Jerusalem could hear the witness of God's mighty deeds and glory in their own language. The scriptures testify that all were amazed and perplexed, and yet some sneered and accused the disciples of drinking wine, but it was only nine o'clock in the morning!

What happened that morning was an unexpected miracle, but for those who had ears to hear, Jesus had already begun to prepare his disciples for this wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He was preparing the disciples to be his witnesses. And we, too, are called to be God's witnesses. In fact, our lectionary readings each week, since Easter, have already chronicled what the Holy Spirit has been up to, as the disciples were called to forgive, to proclaim God's glory, and to live in unity in the name of Jesus. As we remember Pentecost, we too are called to go and to do the same.

Last week we celebrated Jesus' ascension into heaven, and before Jesus departed, he gave his disciples key instructions that would transform not only their lives, but would launch the most radical movement this world has ever known: the church! He told them, "*You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

Looking back at one of Jesus' first post-resurrection encounters with the disciples, we can see that Jesus was already preparing the disciples to serve as his witnesses by helping them to forgive. In that first encounter, Jesus came to the disciples in person and in peace and breathed the Holy Spirit on them to forgive the sins of the political and religious leaders who had betrayed them, inflicted injustice upon them, and crucified Jesus. These disciples had every reason to be bitter and unforgiving, and yet Jesus gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins, because he had work for a them to do: to witness to the life of the Triune God in unity and in love. Just as Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto the disciples to forgive sins, he continues to breathe the Holy Spirit into us, so that we, too, can forgive sins. To live as a witness for Jesus starts with the forgiveness of sins of yourself and of others, in the name of Jesus by the power and love of the Holy Spirit.

Fifty days after the resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' disciples to create new life in unity with the power of language and love. This would launch the day that Jesus' forgiveness, love and reconciliation would begin to be put to the test. As the Holy Spirit empowered each one of the disciples to testify to God's glory, the Holy Spirit created unity and community among diverse peoples. This was the reversal of the Tower of Babel.

The Tower of Babel built a witness to mankind united apart from God; at Pentecost God built a witness to Jesus, through the church, united with God. We call Pentecost the birthday of the church, because from this point onward, we see Jesus' disciples transformed into apostles, who go out into the world as witnesses to God's love, forgiveness and unity, going to people and

places they would not have gone to on their own. Immediately after the outpouring, Peter proclaimed the gospel to hostile rulers and elders who crucified Jesus. Later, Philip was transported to teach and to baptize the Ethiopian Eunuch. Then Peter was sent to bring the gospel to the gentile, Cornelius, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, and his whole household was baptized. The scriptures testify to us that just as the Holy Spirit leads God's people closer to Jesus, God's Spirit also leads us closer to each other. To live as a witness for Jesus means going to unexpected people and places, and wherever the Spirit leads us, to love and to serve others in Jesus' name in the power and love of the Holy Spirit.

With all this talk about living as a witness and the birthday of the church some 2000 years ago; we may wonder how Pentecost applies to us now. Today we have two special baptisms: Bryne and Natalia. In just a few minutes, these little-ones are also going to be asked to live as witnesses to the mighty love and deeds of our Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To those who are presenting them, they, too will be charged to live as God's witnesses. And to all of us gathered here today, we, too, will be called upon to serve as witnesses to God's glory to Bryne and Natalia. Each one of their precious lives already tells a story of God's mighty deeds and acts of grace and mercy, and it is up to all of us to continue to let them tell them *their* stories, to tell them *our* stories, and to tell them *God's* stories.

What does it mean for us to live as witnesses to these two beloved children of God? It starts with connecting our life-story with Jesus. It means sharing with each other what difference Jesus has made in our own lives? I was lost, but now I am found. I was blind, but now I see. I was a captive, but now I am free. Jesus gave me shelter in the storm. Jesus was my shield and fortress in the battle. Jesus gave me rest when I was weary. I was far off and Jesus brought me close; I was an outcast, and now I am a beloved child of God. To live as a witness for Jesus connects our personal story to Jesus' story through the power and love of the Holy Spirit. What is our story? What is our witness? What difference has Jesus made in our life? The witness of Jesus, through our words and actions in this world, offers an invitation of hope to one another, to taste and see that the Lord is good. This is our Pentecost!

Come Holy Spirit, fill us with your love and power to share God's glory, help us to forgive, help us to go and to serve people and in places that are not our own choosing. We choose you, Jesus. Help us to be your witnesses to Bryne and Natalia, to each other, and to the ends of the earth. Amen.