

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

May 23, 2021 – DAY OF PENTECOST / WHITSUNDAY (YR. B)

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Baptized Afresh and Filled Anew!*”

First Lesson	Acts 2:1-21	(God's Holy Spirit descends upon the believers on the Day of Pentecost)
Psalter	Psalm 104:25-35, 37	(The Lord sends forth His Spirit and creates all things)
Second Lesson	Romans 8:22-27	(The Holy Spirit helps us to pray)
Gospel	St. John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15	(Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit)

We know today is the Day of Pentecost. Every Christian Church does! Some decorate with red balloons or flame-colored streamers, symbolizing the Holy Spirit alighting upon the disciples as tongues of fire. Others ask their congregation to wear red, or have a special cake to celebrate the birthday of the Church. The only people who didn't know it was Pentecost were Jesus' disciples! That's because He didn't tell them when He would send the Holy Spirit.

So, in the meantime, they were going about church business. After all, they were trying to discern a replacement for Judas. And their criterion was someone who had been with Jesus from the day He was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Acts 1:22). Interesting requirement. What they didn't understand was that they, like Jesus, would also need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to stop doing church business, and start doing God's business. As the disciples waited in Jerusalem, they were due for a humdinger, because whenever the creative nature of the Holy Spirit is at work, it's always a “Big Bang.”

The first blowout was at Creation—when the Spirit of God brought about *something* out of *nothing*, and declared it good. The second blast was the Incarnation—when the Holy Spirit brought together the human and the divine in one unique person, so that God could bring salvation to the world He had *made*. Now, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit brings to those whom God has *saved* His abiding presence, invincible power, and edifying gifts, in order to complete the work of Creation as well as the Incarnation—through us, you and me.

The Bible shows us that before Pentecost, the work of the Spirit was transient or temporary. The Spirit was given to the ancient prophets at certain times, or poured out on kings in specific, limited ways. But at Pentecost, the anointing Jesus received at His baptism was now extended to every person who lives by faith, and in a way that cannot be withdrawn. That's because God's long-term plan is to conform us to His Son, Jesus Christ. He desires to accomplish in and through us what He accomplished in Jesus. Just prior to today's gospel lesson, in John 14:12, Jesus says: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” In order for us to become like Christ to the world, and do His works—or, as He says, *even greater works*—we need to be born again and then renewed daily by His Holy Spirit.¹

The freshness and renewal that the Spirit brings rekindle our availability to receive God's gifts, so that we might function as His delivery men and women, becoming avenues through whom those gifts may then flow to others, according to His will.

Within every Spirit-filled believer are one or more ministry gifts waiting to flow toward those who are suffering, or in pain, or in need of divine grace. Jesus Himself said in Mark 16:17-18: “These signs and wonders will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” Think how awesome and wonderful it would be, to be part of God's redemptive, freeing, and healing ministry! Any Christian is capable of this, if God wills it, and we are open to His will.

The Holy Spirit also wants to help us in our prayer life. While we certainly know how to intercede about many situations, there are times when, frankly, we don't have a clue *how* or *what* to pray. However, St. Paul assures us in Romans 8:26-27 (ESV) that: "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ... because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." What a privilege the Lord offers us: When we are filled with His Spirit, *God Himself* will pray through us and for us.

The Apostle Paul also wrote in Ephesians 1:17: "I pray that the glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ better." Why? Because the refreshing and renewal that come through the Holy Spirit always bring new vision and deeper insight into God's purpose in our lives. And, the Spirit then equips us to *live out* that purpose.

On that first Day of Pentecost, God filled Jesus' disciples with the Holy Spirit, then poured His same Spirit out on 3,000 others who believed and were baptized, giving birth to the Church. That's because Spirit-fullness is God's intention for every Christian, whether in 1st-century Palestine or 21st-century Compass. Jesus said in Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of earth." What Jesus meant is that the Holy Spirit wants to reshape our perspective on the world, our passion for the lost, and our focus on human need, while equipping us to bring Christ to others ... and others to Christ.

When we read in Acts 2:4, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" the Greek word for "to fill" actually denotes an *overflowing*. In other words, when God pours His Holy Spirit into us, there is more than enough! This reminds us that, although we cannot depend on our own scant resources, God's abundant supply is always sufficient. Jesus said in John 15:5, "Without *me*, you can do nothing."

We know we are weak and underpowered. We are all too aware of our intellectual limitations and our spiritual entropy. Which is why we continually need a fresh infilling of God's power and presence, His guidance, and help, through the work of His Holy Spirit.

Remembering the Church's first Pentecost also is a fitting day for each of us to revisit our own baptism—both by water, and by the Holy Spirit. Hear again St. Peter's words from Acts, Chapter 2 (38-39): "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to ... as many as the Lord our God will call." On this day, God calls us to be *renewed* through the meaning of our water baptism, and to be *refilled* through the dynamic of our baptism in the Holy Spirit. Our Lord wants this for us so that He may conform us to the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ—both in His suffering and in His glory—and so that we may do the works that Jesus did, until He returns.²

Therefore, I invite each of you, after you have received Communion this morning, to remain briefly in front of altar rail if you wish to receive anointing with holy oil (using a new Q-tip for each person) and a prayer for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit for holy living and whatever spiritual gifts God wills to bless you with. I'll close with a prayer inspired by Pastor Jack Hayford:

"Holy Spirit come upon us,
 Pour Your grace and glory all around,
 Now at Jesus' feet we're bowing,
 Let the fire of heaven flood this holy ground.
 As we lift our hands in full surrender,
 Fill our lives and lips with highest praise:
 Come fill us now! Come fill us now!
 Holy Spirit come upon us,
 That ... our Lord and Savior, Jesus
 may fill all our ways, [through] all our days.³ *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. Daniel Herzog, "The Holy Spirit," Workshop: The 146th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, 6 June 2014. Used with permission.

² Adapt. Jack Hayford, *Living the Spirit Formed Life: Growing in the 10 Principles of Spirit-Filled Discipleship* (Ventura CA: Regal Books-Gospel Light, 2001), pp. 122-131.

³ Adapt. Hayford, *op. cit.*, p. 131.