

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2018  
Day of Pentecost - Year B

Acts 2:1-21  
Psalm 104:26-36  
Romans 8:22-27  
John 15:26-27,16:4b-15

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Welcome, this morning, to this most important feast in the Christian calendar - the Feast of Pentecost. And why do I say it is a most important feast? Let me try and explain why, by way of a story - and like all good stories, this one begins with a variation on the classic theme of “once upon a time.”

In the beginning... God created, and everything that God created was good. God created the earth and the sky, the land and the sea, the animals and the nations, fixing the boundaries of the peoples, and he apportioned them according to the number of angels who dwelt with him in heaven. Each nation was watched over by an angel, except for Israel itself, which was cared for directly by God.

There was, it seems, one angel whose role was to test the people, and, if they sinned, to punish them. At first this was understood to be the role of a number of angels - and sometimes even God himself - but later people decided there was one specialist tester or tempter, one called Satan. He appears only briefly - named twice in the Old Testament, tempting God and Job, and accusing Joshua.

But between the two testaments we discover that eventually Satan rebels against God, along with a number of the other angels. They “judged unjustly” and “showed partiality to the wicked” (according to the words of the Psalms) and were cast out of heaven. Together they began to form their own kingdom in opposition to God’s Kingdom of Light.

They formed the Kingdom of Darkness, and great wars began in heaven. Satan fought with Michael, and although he was defeated, the Kingdom of Darkness continued to grow - because now it had new numbers, as humans chose to join it.

Eventually it took over the whole earth. By the New Testament, Satan was named in John's Gospel as the "ruler of this world" or "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) who, in the vastness of the desert can offer this kingdom to Jesus if he will simply bow down and worship him (Mt 4:8-10) because it is his. The world is, as Paul writes to the Colossians, utterly under his power or dominion of darkness (Col 1:13).

And then, into this world of Darkness, one person is born who does not sin. A shard of light from the Kingdom of Light pierces the Kingdom of Darkness and cannot be put out. Instead, the light starts to quench the darkness. Demons flee, illnesses are cured, oppressions are lifted, those who are bound are set free, and the dead are raised. Imagine it... one light moving steadily around, changing the darkness that is smothering the people into light.

Yet the Darkness is so entrenched in the world that people find it hard to recognise the Light even when it shines before them. Repeatedly they are told that this Kingdom, this Light, has come near; that it is close to and among them (Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Mk 1:5; Mk 12:34; Lk 10:9; Lk 11:20; Lk 17:21;18:16) - "The Kingdom of God is like"; "The Kingdom of Heaven is...", they are told, yet still very few recognise the Light for what it is.

The Darkness repeatedly tries to overcome the Light and cannot. The religious leaders of the day do not see it for what it is. Even when the darkness appears to have won, and the Light is brought into the stronghold of Satan himself, death, even there the Light cannot be put out. Rather, "Death had no dominion over him" (Rom 6:9). Instead, the Light bursts through death and is released into the world, at Easter.

But it must go further - the light must be taken to all corners and places of the world where darkness still tries to rule - how can this light be spread? This is where Pentecost fits in - because remember what happens at Pentecost. Christ's Spirit comes to his followers and transforms them... it turns them into lights - into candles!

“divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue of fire rested on each of them”, we are told, in our reading from Acts. Yes, through this feast today, the Kingdom of Light has entered the world and conquered the Darkness, and it is there to stay. Now just as yeast spreads through dough (Mt 13:33), the task of his followers is to continue the battle against “the cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Eph 6:12) by spreading the Light ever further through the Kingdom.

How appropriate it is this morning, then, that we light another candle - that we add another person to that band of followers - called to go out as a light in the world. You see the image of light is equally important in our service of Baptism. That is why we will shortly light a real candle for Alice, as she is welcomed through water and the Spirit into the church.

Her baptism candle will be lit from our Easter Candle - that constant reminder to us of how the light rose from the tomb - the candle which was brought into the darkened church on Easter morning as a sign to us of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. All of our subsequent candles that day are lit from the one central light, just a small symbol of how the light goes out from a central source.

And it is to that source of light, Jesus Christ, that we hold - when the darkness of this world threatens to overwhelm us - when the news of the day seems only to bring darkness and despair - more and more news of chaos and conflict, we remember that we are bearers of light, called to go out and share that light; that hope; with those we know.

It's not easy to shine our lights these days - there are many things which threaten to extinguish them. But the promise of God's Spirit, given at that first Pentecost, gives us the hope to go on. It calls us to risk reaching out continually in grace and mercy to our neighbours. It exhorts us to look beyond the safety of these walls inside which we gather today, and to see and respond to the needs around us.

It challenges us - are our eyes and ears open to the work of the Spirit? Most importantly... are our hearts and our lives open? We all too often talk about waiting for the Spirit to come. Well it's too late... Pentecost has happened! The Spirit of God is alive and active here and now! Pentecost is now.

And our hope for the present and the future lies not in any clever scheme or program we can dream up, but in this and this alone... in discerning/seeing what the Spirit of God is already doing in our midst, and running full-pelt to join in!

Let us give thanks to God for the light which shines in the world, and for the Spirit which gives us strength. And as we do, we give thanks to God for Alice, who this morning is gifted with the Spirit, and Baptised into the body of Christ in the world - the Church.

The Lord be with you...