

## All Saints – Pentecost – June 8, 2014

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**Acts 2:1-11**; I Corinthians 12:4-13, John 14:8-17

!Come Holy Spirit come, come as the fire and burn, come as the wind and cleanse, convict, convert, consecrate our lives for our great good and Your greater glory. Amen

### Good Morning!

Everyone has heard sermons about God. And nearly everyone has heard sermons about Jesus Christ. However, comparatively few have heard sermons about God the Holy Spirit whose festival-Pentecost-we celebrate today.

There's a good reason why we don't hear many sermons *about* the Holy Spirit. A preacher can speak *about* God "the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth, lifting our hearts in praise of the divine power Who is Love, and stretching our minds toward an understanding of the holy. It is even more possible to speak about Jesus Christ, who translated these divine qualities into the language of our human experience. We can talk about his life on earth. We can recreate the scenes in which he encountered people like us, watch him as he mixed with crowds as a healer, a teacher, inviting everyone into the new community that he termed the kingdom of God. We can watch him challenging powers of evil and also in close personal touch with individual men and women, caring for them as human beings, paying no attention to their age or sex, or

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race, or reputation. We can talk about the stories he told, God's expectations for his children and the grace that is offered to turn us around and set us on the right path. We can follow his story from the shores of Galilee to the hill called Calvary and be even more amazed at his utter integrity, his courage, his compassion, and be awestruck by the mystery of his death and resurrection.

But what can we say *about* the Holy Spirit? God the Holy Spirit is God in action, God at work in the universe, in the Church, and in our hearts. Jesus told his disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them he would not draw attention to himself. Jesus said: "He will not be speaking of his own accord ... he will glorify me, since all that he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine." Knowing the reality of the Holy Spirit is like knowing the reality of the sun in the sky. We don't, if we are wise, stare up at the sun. We know its reality by the life and light of the world around us. We look at the radiant flowers, the soaring mountains, the rolling ocean, and the shining rivers, and say, "What a beautiful world."

If we need to say something *about* the Spirit there is nothing better to say than "The Spirit gives life"-and life cannot be described.

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Yet nothing could be more real, more central to our experience. Without physical life we wouldn't exist, and we cling to it in this generation with a tenacity that belies the pessimists and delights the manufacturers of pills and potions.

Beyond our own existence we discuss the life of nations-their "rise

and fall," the life of cities and civilizations, the life of a political party, a philosophy, or a church. Then we claim to detect whether or not there is "life" in any of the movements or meetings we may attend. We know when a play, a party, a demonstration, or a rally has no "life" in it. We know too the difference between days when everything seems to come alive and the days when we could confess with Shakespeare's Macbeth that

*"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the' stage,  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."*

"I believe in the Holy Spirit," says the Nicene Creed, "the Lord and Giver of life." To be in touch with this Spirit is to know the presence and power of a transcendent Lord who brings all creation to life, who breathes 4. through all the activities that celebrate love, truth, and beauty, who sustains the community of Christ, who speaks the languages of concern, compassion, presence, and burden-bearing, and confirms the aspirations of our soul.

The Bible invites us to see the whole cosmos as throbbing with the life of the Spirit. There have been times when it seemed as though the amazing discoveries of science had eliminated the notion of a life-giving Spirit. The world was seen as a machine spinning on its way according to the laws of Newtonian physics.

As Alexander Pope put it in the late eighteenth century,

*"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night: God said, 'Let Newton be!' and all was light."*

In our day Sir John Squire replied,

*"It did not last: the Devil, howling 'Ho! Let Einstein be!' restored the status quo."*

A way of saying that the mystery is back. Today it is not the scientists but the secularists who dismiss any spiritual interpretation of the universe.

A new generation is again seeking for the life-giving Spirit that  
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animates all creation, that is at work in the human mind and heart, inspiring the work of the scientist, the vision of the artist, the insight of the poet, and the recovery of what we know as "reverence for life."

We are learning to see the world, not as an iron gauntlet in the hand of a static God, but as a silken glove in the hand of a life-giving Spirit.

But there is a dark side to all this. We all know it. We are in a world where there is obviously another force at work in direct opposition to the life giving Spirit. More than any other generation we recognize the power of the death-dealing spirit, the powers of evil, the lords of darkness, the demonic. It doesn't matter what name we use. Like Milton, we know the threat of the forces of "Chaos and Old Night."

The Bible acknowledges this power and gives example after example of its work of division and death in the human family. However, the heart of the Bible message is that the Spirit of life is constantly at work to bring harmony, reconciliation, and life to this scattered and battered family of God. The Spirit of

life creates a new family of God, (and we welcome Laural, Greyson and Brennan into it today, a new family of God) who share the vision of God's kingdom and whose watchwords are not hatred, gloom, violence, rivalry, fanaticism, selfishness, and lies, but as the

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Apostle Paul tells us they are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control".

The Old Testament prophets inspired their people in times of doubt and distress with the vision of a community recreated by the Spirit of life. For instance, Ezekiel painted the picture of the death of a nation as a "valley of dry bones." Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the bones and say, "Thus saith the Lord God ... Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

Centuries later Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth proclaiming his mission, and his words were these:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to let the broken victims go free."*

Throughout the Gospels where we read of the words and actions of Jesus and the passion whereby he gave his life for the broken human family, it is made clear that he was not some demigod with magical powers but one like us-except that he was totally filled and controlled by 7.

the Spirit of life. And he drew around him a family of friends to whom he promised a share in his life-giving, rescuing mission. Promising them that the Father would give them another Advocate to be with them forever: "The Spirit of Truth."

After the trauma of Jesus' death, Resurrection and Ascension they waited a few days, praying, and then it happened. The life-giving Spirit came like a roaring wind. They were not given instructions as to who or what this Spirit was. They experienced her presence. Everything came to life: their faith and hope, the Scriptures they had read, and the dry bones of their confused and disrupted community. The flame that was lit in each of them merged in one empowering and unifying blaze that birthed Christ's church. And now they were off on the greatest life-giving mission of all time.

Does this seem a long way from the activities of a church like ours? And if there is one place where we need the infusion of the life-giving Spirit it is in our beliefs, our prayers, and our understanding of the role of a local church today. For remember Dante warned us: the darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.

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The question is, Are we living, as individuals and as a church, according to religious rules, or are we in touch with the life-giving Spirit? The popular conception of religion is that it means accepting a set of moral values and trying to live by them with the help of God. In its crudest form this is the old belief that "if you're good you'll get to heaven." The Gospel says nothing of the kind, for that's

not good news. As Jesus often pointed out, none of us is good enough. So, when we measure ourselves honestly against his concept of goodness, recalling He said: "There must be no limit to your goodness as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds," we're bound to feel guilty, and the more we struggle to be good, the more we fall into despair. If our religion is "living by the rule book," it can bring neither life nor hope. Such a religion is, in Paul's language, a mortal disease. It is death dealing, not life-giving. For the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

To be in touch with the life-giving Spirit means a religion of joyful, adventurous communion with the Spirit of Christ. We are invited to live in him and he in us. We are sustained by the literal in-spiration of Christ the Lord. We are delivered from both the arrogance of those who think they've made it, and the despair of those who think they never will. It is 9.

like the difference between children who live securely in the knowledge of the love of parents, and children who feel always under the pressure of rules. It is like the work of an artist, who doesn't fulfill his or her calling just by studying the rules, imitating the teacher, without ever experiencing the thrill of working for the love of it, cooperating with the spirit of great teachers but eventually expressing that life-giving spirit that sets the personality free. In both cases the rules are needed, the discipline is essential, but beyond all else lies the power of the indwelling and liberating Spirit of life.

For that change to take place we need to keep aloft the sails of expectancy and faith so that when the slightest breeze comes from the life-giving

Spirit, we may joyfully respond. **AMEN**