

Message
Pentecost – May 31, 2009
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-11
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On Tuesday, Christ Church embarks on a mission trip to New Canaan Orphanage in Haiti. Here's some things about Haiti. Over 7 million people live in the 11 thousand square miles of Haiti, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Haitians are of African descent and they refer to all outsiders as blan or whites, regardless of their skin color. Haitians are very proud to be the first independently black-ruled nation in the world since their independence from the French in 1804. French, their original official language. Kreyol is now the primary language. We'll travel outside of Haiti's capital, Port au Prince, to a rural area where the houses are brightly colored 2 room cinder block, single story dwellings. Our main meal will be rice and beans and beans and rice. We'll be pleasantly surprised with the Haitian display of friendship. Men hold hands as do women. When greeting one another, we'll say hello several times before continuing on with the conversation. Upon our departure, we'll give equal emphasis to the good byes, shaking hands and kissing one another on both cheeks. There's much for us to take in and learn with our new friends in Haiti. We're excited to experience how God leads us to be the church through this extraordinary experience. Please pray for us. Pray for the children living restored, renewed, saved lives through God's work with New Canaan Orphanage. Knowing we're supported through prayer by our faith community keeps us connected and forever mindful of the power of God's Spirit working.

Today is the Feast of Pentecost. As Christians, we know Pentecost as the birth of the Church. So, happy birthday everyone. This is a day of great joy and celebration. And, we'll honor this day welcoming the newest members into the Church through baptism. Now, for those twelve disciples gathered, they are yet to experience the birth of the Church. They're waiting. Jesus has promised them the gift of a comforter, a counselor, a paraclete, an advocate, one who speaks the truth, the Holy Spirit. They've gathered for the major feast day of Pentecost during the Feast of Weeks to give thanks to God for their first fruits of the harvest. Judaic Law states that fifty days from the Passover Feast, thanksgiving and celebration is offered for the early harvest. So, they give thanks and offer up to God two loaves as signs of a healthy barley crop. Over time, Pentecost also came to be called, Shavout; thanksgiving for Moses receiving the Torah, the Law, from God at Mount Sinai.

Suddenly, the whole house is filled with a deafening roar, a sound so penetrating, like the gush and rush of a wind that it shuts out all but its only noise. Completely encompassing the house is this outpouring of God's energy, utterly uncontainable, bursting through. It's the promised Holy Spirit, the best of all good things. Now it rests, without explanation, as divided flames of fire, like tongues, on top of the heads of the disciples. What a sight. And the noise, oh the noise, bombarding those disciples, bowling them over, filling them up. There's no room,

no time, no place or space for anything but this Holy Spirit, the best of all good things. This Holy Spirit doesn't rest. First left speechless, the disciples are now all talking at once. The Spirit gives each their language; all with a different voice. And yet, there is a common understanding, in spite of the differences. The mystery and miracle of the power of God's Spirit rushing in brings unity, bridges gaps, gives birth to a new community, based on God's never failing love, given to us in the promise of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The church is born. Happy Birthday Church.

For the disciples, the power of the Holy Spirit, means action. Off they go to build and grow the church. And so it does. In one day, they grow to as many as three thousand; a mega church. So it grows. Today, the newest members of the Church, Grace, Alex, Alexander, Hunter, Ethan, Trevor, and Nicholas, will be received into the body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism. And, this morning, we'll recognize Nick's baptism and give thanks for God bringing him to Meghan and Bill through the blessing of adoption. Now, at least three powerful things happen at baptism: First, we're granted, through the grace and mercy of God's love for us, the forgiveness of sins. God so desires for us to know his reconciling love, as promised through Jesus Christ. Next, we're given the gift of the Holy Spirit, this power of God within us and surrounding us that teaches and guides us to be God's people in the world, now and forever. Finally, baptism is entrance into the body of Christ, the Church. Each of us here has been given special gifts through this mysterious Holy Spirit that surrounds us and permeates our very being. God wants us to use these gifts for the good of the body, the Church. When we do, we discover in ourselves those parts of us we never knew possible. But, it's the collective combination of our gifts that makes the church. We don't do our faith in isolation. We are a body, a community, gathered to be God's people in the world. So, these young ones, dressed up with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, they're about to get equipped to go out. Here's our part. We agree to uphold them in their journey, to support them in their walk with Christ. We let them know how valuable they are to the community. If they're not here, we want to know why. We pray for them and with them. We invite them to be a part of Bible studies, Sunday School, teachings, times of friendship and fellowship, opportunities for service and giving. We're really glad they're here and we tell them so. We show up when they need us. We gather together and worship. We give thanks for how God fills us with this power of the Spirit to be his Church.

There's a guarantee in being the Church. Life gets better and better. Come, be regular with worship. Commit. Serve. Include. Especially include others who might just talk a different talk. Here's what happens. The day gets better, the week makes more sense and we can feel the power of the Spirit growing within us and around us. This is how to be the Church. We just keep growing and going. Last night, some of you were here for the annual spring concert. The Holy Spirit was bouncing off the walls as Keith and Missy, our ministers of music, musicians and choirs of angels, young and not so young, brought the Spirit alive through their extraordinary gifts. The night was unforgettable as we saw the Church moving and

having its being. Throughout the evening faithful folks came forward to share their story of God working in their lives. One reflected on how in a time of turmoil, she knew nothing else to do other than to pray, and to invite others to pray with her. God revealed in her gifts she didn't know she had, to be used in a time of stress and pressure. Another witness reminded us of the beauty of God's steadfastness; that even when we leave God, God never leaves us; that we truly cannot manage without God as our anchor; and that trusting in God, we find a resting place. A third revealed how God's love always wins out, especially in times of deep sorrow and grief. Another finds obedience as the key to using her gifts. Stop, listen, and obey and we will be surprised with great joy. Another told of hope, found in God, never lost, even as his family and friends are savaged by the tragedy of war. Finally, another has put complete trust in God only to uncover the gifts of courage and strength during a life threatening illness; a courage and strength that he sees through this place, you, his Church. All spoke with conviction and purpose at God's presence in their lives. None spoke without the reassurance that they were surrounded by the power of the Spirit, as the Church, a Spirit of love and compassion, tenderness and beauty; a Spirit that sets our hearts on fire; that bombards us with grace and mercy; a Spirit that pushes us to grow in the love of Jesus Christ.

God is still speaking, still pushing, still filling us with the power of his Spirit. This is demanding, and challenging, being the Church. See, Jesus, he spent his time with sinners; people who didn't always reveal the truth, who spoke with twisted words, who had resentment on their hearts; people who lived with so much fear, they failed to trust in the power of God's redeeming love. This is kingdom living, says Jesus, this is Church living. So, this birthday, it's probably just a bit messy and not as neat and tidy as we wish it to be. But, we keep at it. We welcome and cherish these newest members. We give thanks for how God loves us so completely with the power of his Spirit; and we live as God's, discovering within us and within one another this kingdom living God calls us to live as the Church. Keep growing and going and Happy Birthday!!