

## **PENTECOST SUNDAY: MAY 23, 2010.**

### **Acts 2:1-11; John 14:8-17, 25-27.**

#### **Notes:**

- Theophilus was probably Luke's patron and the earlier book was the Gospel of Luke which covered the time from the birth of Jesus through till his ascension.
- The risen Lord appeared to them throughout the forty days and that figure is important to Luke as it is a number associated with Moses and Elijah.
- The central message of the teaching of Jesus related to the Kingdom of God.
- The direction of Jesus that they "remain in the City" is a part of Luke's theme as he locates Jerusalem as the centre of the first part of the story of Acts.
- The reference to them being baptised with the Holy Spirit picks up the theme from the story of John the Baptist. In Luke and Matthew there is added to the story of the baptism in the Spirit the line "and with fire". Here, in Luke's Pentecost story these two elements – Spirit and fire – will be joined together.
- From the beginning Luke is setting out the stage for the drama: first in Jerusalem, then into Judaea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.
- Jesus was "lifted up" into heaven. It is from his throne in heaven that he now continues his work of salvation.
- The two men in white clothing are probably meant to be Moses and Elijah, the two who were depicted as engaging with Jesus in a discussion at the transfiguration.

In some ways it looks a little strange to have this reading from Acts instead of the actual account of the coming down of the Holy Spirit that is recorded in chapter 2 of Acts. However, in the Gospel reading and in this reading from Acts helps to put the theology of Pentecost out for us and in some ways that is more important than just telling the story over again.

The key thing in this story is how Luke sees the movement of the Church. It was never meant to be a gathering of the friends of Jesus. It was never meant to be a little reformed sect of Judaism that make for itself a comfortable life in Jerusalem. These were clearly the temptations, to take the gift of the Kingdom of God and then form some kind of mutual admiration society of those who were saved. They could then sit back and wait for the Lord to return and end everything.

Right from the beginning of the Church Luke is stressing a very different understanding of what discipleship means. It is about going out "into Judaea, Samaria and the rest of the world. That is quite an ambitious suggestion but it is significant because it goes to the very heart of what the Gospel is all about. It is about Good News for all peoples and the purpose of having The Twelve, of gathering disciples together was purely for this work of taking out to the world the message that they were healed, saved, restored and forgiven in Christ.

It was also important for Luke's theology of the Church to have Jesus taken up into heaven for it makes a symbolic break with the past but also acts as a kind of commissioning of the disciples. Jesus is still there with them, standing at the right hand of God, watching over them, acting as their guarantor that what they did in his name would bear lasting fruit. It is Jesus who remains "in charge" of the Church and like some heavenly Field marshal gathers and disperses his missionaries so that his work can continue. It is precisely because Jesus is at his Father's side in heaven that we can be sure that our work of proclaiming the Gospel will ultimately be successful. If we had to depend on our human skills, our human motivation, our human resources we would be doomed. But what the Church is doing is collaborating with Jesus in his ongoing divine ministry for the transformation of the whole of creation. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Moses and Elijah sum things up fairly accurately. They admonish the gathered disciples for standing around looking up into heaven, lamenting the departure of their saviour. They send them back to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Spirit. There is the tension in our work as disciples. Which one of them would have been thrilled to return to Jerusalem? That was the City where their Saviour had been crucified. That was where the enemies of Jesus were to be found, that was where they would have been suspects and under the eye of the authorities. Why go back there?

The easier path would have been, like Peter, James and John at the transfiguration, to build some kind of home on the mountain top and spend their time “looking up into heaven” and waiting for things to come to an end with the return of Jesus. But that has never been the way of the Church, as the coming story of the Acts will make clear. They have to be in Jerusalem, in the world, where ever people happen to be living, for it is to the world that they have been sent. Their mission was never about themselves. It was always about others. It is not just about them being saved but about them taking the Good News out to the world that others may know what it is like to live in the light of the Kingdom of God.

This reading is a challenging one for all of us today as it is a reminder of where our priorities need to be. Each and every one of us is a missionary through out baptism and our faith communities only remain truly Christian communities when we are seeking for ways to engage the world with the Gospel. You have this feeling in the opening verses of the Book of Acts that God is about to unleash a powerful force into the world, one that would be directly under his control but one that was also empowered with the Spirit of God.

### **Notes to John 14:8-17,25-27**

- The only time the word “satisfied” is used in the Gospel it is to be found in the lips of Phillip and is a word that indicates the fundamental spiritual search that is so much a part of the journey of all men and women (see Exodus 33:18; 24:9-11; Isaiah 6:1; 40:5).
- Jesus does not address his answer to Philip but to all of the apostles.
- Jesus begins by affirming that he and the Father are such that the one who sends (the Father) is completely identified with the “one who is sent” (Jesus).
- When Jesus says that the disciples will perform even greater works than he has performed he is indicating that this will happen because he is going to the father. It is not as though the Church will carry out these great works in its own name. The ministry of Jesus continues on in the Church.
- The sending of the Spirit is the sending of “another Advocate” meaning that Jesus himself was their first advocate with the Father.
- Verse 26 is the only place in the Bible where the expressing “*the* Holy Spirit is mentioned”. This Advocate is sent by the Father and is sent in the name of Jesus. Thus, for John, the mission continues.
- Jesus offers them the gift of Shalom, peace, that tranquillity that comes about when they are united together in the work of the Kingdom.

This story begins with the expressed yearning of Philip for “satisfaction” and in speaking in this way he outlines a basic need for all men and women. We all want to know what is the meaning of life, what is our place in it, where it is all this going and what will happen to us when we die and most of all how all things hold together in some kind of united purpose. Phillip speaks for all of us and it is this search for meaning that John is seeking to address in his Gospel.

John reminds them that he has been sent by his Father and that the work he is about is the work of his Father. If they want to know God, if they want to find a way into the divine, then all they have to do is unite themselves with Jesus and live as he teaches them to live. It is by obeying his commandments that they will have life to the full.

What happens when they believe in Jesus is that the works of Jesus come alive in them. They will not only be able to “do what Jesus did”, they will do even greater things than Jesus! That is some promise and it only makes sense when we remember that it is Jesus who continues to work away in the ministry of the Apostles. This is what will make it possible for them to do these great and amazing things: they model their lives on Jesus, believing in him and living as he commands them. That, after all, is perhaps the simplest and most comprehensive definition of what the Church is: it is a community of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

It is the theme of love that holds this section together. The disciples show that they love Jesus by doing as he wants, by living according to his commandments. In saying things in this way, what John is offering his Church is a way of evaluating the level of their faithfulness. All they have to do is measure all that they do against Jesus, the way he lived and acted and the teachings that he passed on to them. If our actions can be true mirrors of the actions of Jesus then we are disciples. If we cannot find Jesus in them, if they project a message to the world that is not the message of Jesus, then we cannot justify continuing on with those actions. For John, it is love that becomes the key measure. This is the Truth that the paraclete will bring: an understanding that the whole of life is measured by this one commandment: love as the Father loves; love as Jesus loves for “God is love and whoever lives in love, lives in God and God lives in them”.

And so Jesus ends this section of his teaching with the promise of “peace”. It is a peace that can only be received as a gift from Jesus. It is not a peace they can obtain. This divine peace is a gift and it only comes about when life is lived in the presence of Jesus. Those who seek to be Christ like will know peace for Jesus is himself the Father’s gift of peace.

Peace from a biblical perspective is what happened on the seventh day of creation. God rested. The image we have from that is the one that shows God walking around the garden of Eden, hand in hand with Adam and Eve. That is peace. It is a gift that is only broken by sin. When sin crept into the world Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden and peace was no more. But the promise was always there. The image of paradise remained on offer but before it could become a reality, sin had to be destroyed and that is why the Father sent his Son, so that Peace might once again be the mark of creation.

### **Conclusion:**

Pentecost is all about something God is doing to his creatures and for his creatures. It is the season when we remember who we are: people who are gathered together in an experience of divine love and divine peace and then sent out into the world to transform the whole of creation with those two gifts. There is no greater ministry that we can have. The Church was not brought into existence for its own self. It was always meant to be a light to the world, drawing people out of their darkness into the

light of the Kingdom of God. This light shines by how we live in the world. The Church was always meant to be a leaven in the midst of the world, raising it up so that men and women were able to live to their fullest humanity, freed from the burdens of sins and failures. And finally, the Church was a community imbued with the divine love that the Father has for the Son. It is in loving God and loving each other with the same love that the Church is able to convince the world that there is a whole lot more to life than the limited humanity they can see all around them

All this is about the witness of the believers to the Kingdom. About how we live in the world, about our roles as peace makers and lovers. All this suddenly becomes possible because Jesus has sent the Advocate, the Holy Spirit and it is the Spirit-filled power that is the power that transforms. It is because of the Spirit that we have hope and power.