

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 23, 2004  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Live! You Are My Gospel!”**

Today, the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, we gather to celebrate our last Easter Sunday. But, today we are also celebrating the Feast of the Ascension.

The Ascension is a strange feast because we are really celebrating the departure of Jesus from his disciples! That moment, when after he had taught and instructed his disciples in all he wanted them to do, Jesus once again returned to his Father!

Behind him, Jesus left a self-perpetuating Gospel! By that I mean not a book or even a teaching – but a complete way of life – a formula for salvation embodied in these two disciples. They were the seeds of his future Kingdom, and of course that is a metaphor that Jesus used so often in his teaching! Especially in the Parables – Jesus speaks of the faith as a precious seed that must flourish and grow!

The apostles and disciples are that precious seed. From the moment of the Ascension they are sent out into the world – into the unknown! They cannot know if they will be successful – they only know that they have something special within them, something vibrant and alive.

As Jesus leaves them, he gives them a final command. “Go you therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit and I will be with you till the end of time.”

It is the difference between the descriptive and the proscriptive! The teaching of Jesus can be read descriptively, but every now and then Jesus projects his teaching into the future by working a proscriptive command – that is he tells us what to do, how to live, and it is a command we must obey!

So powerful is this commission that as Christians we should arise every day and ask ourselves the question: “what can I do for the Gospel today?” And of course we do! In every response to the needs of a child, in the love we have for a spouse, in the care of aging parents, in reaching out to our neighbors – in the forgiveness we accept and in the forgiveness we give – we live and speak and build Jesus’ Gospel.

Today’s feast is in many ways a celebration of our Christianity. There are few opportunities to celebrate being Christian. I love to hear how proud people are to be Christian. And that is not always easy in our world today! When some Christians receive bad press, it is hard for good Christians to stand tall and operate as a lighthouse. In many ways, in times of Christian prosecution, there is a sense in which Christians proudly stood up for all they believed and did so with dignity. But persecution and imprisonment or even death cannot kill the Gospel or the Christian! – Only mediocrity and indifference can do that. The Gospel has to be that fire that burns within each one of us. And it is no ordinary

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fire – for if we only knew, it is the love of our God burning in our hearts. It is the love of our God – not just our love. God’s love has entered our lives and that love is what truly makes us Christian and followers of Jesus the Lord.

In today’s first reading, Paul and Silas have traveled further than ever before to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now they have crossed from Asia Minor into Macedonia and continue to preach and make converts to “the way.” Their actions are full of the power of the Holy Spirit such that anything seems possible.

In Philippi, they ran foul of the authorities that have them stripped and beaten, after Paul cast the evil spirit out of the young girl. But typically Paul and Silas seem happy to have the opportunity to suffer for the faith.

In the Gospel Jesus prays for those he leaves behind knowing the difficulties and conflicts they will face. In doing so He passes on the grace that his Father has given him and the love that they share.

What happens in those 30 years after the death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus is truly phenomenal. For this little band of disciples build a church that spreads throughout the known world. Despite prosecution and death, nothing is so powerful that it can kill this way of life or this idea that there is a better way to live than violence and conflict.

Our readings today build up to and look towards Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They have a dear and unambiguous message. What happened in those 40 years of the church was no accident. Although Jesus did leave and ascend to the Father, he was very much with his followers in Spirit!

The lesson for us is that we too must live as if Jesus dwells among us, which of course he does. But our faith must be Spirit filled. If it is, then anything is possible – the success that the early Christians experience we can and do experience on a daily basis –even if we do not recognize it at the time.

As we approach Pentecost, let us do so with a spirit of adventure and a spirit of deep faith – that God will send his Spirit among us with the gifts of Spirit to help us achieve his Kingdom here in this place.

Let us pray.

“God our Father, send us your Spirit as you did to your apostles! May he teach us the ways of God – the road of salvation, to discern the truth, to judge what is prudent, to have courage to reach out and build your church – bigger than our dreams; truer than our convictions, stronger than our doubts. But Lord, we ask that your Spirit use us – sometimes old, sometimes young, broken, wounded, but strong in hope, and with the gifts of your Spirit – alive to the fire of the Gospel in our lives! This we ask through Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen +”

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