

“The Day of the Spirit”
June 5, 2022 - Pentecost Sunday
Acts 2: 1 -21 / 1 Corinthians 12: 3b – 13
Rev. L. Bryan McClain

I am a big fan of animated movies. And one of my favorite movies is Finding Nemo. One of my favorite scenes in that movie (and I had a lot), but one of the most poignant scenes that stood out for me is when the school of fish is caught in the net. And Nemo knowing what is in store for the confused fish, begins to command, “Everybody, swim down!”

It takes him a while to get them to listen because the fish don’t understand what is happening to them, and they are hard-pressed to believe a little fish at such a chaotic time in their lives. But finally, he gets them to do what he says, and they swim their way to freedom. No disrespect to our watermen in the crowd, but it shows the power of what can happen when we take our gifts and use them for the common good.

It was the day of Pentecost, which if you did not know, was actually a holy day in the Jewish tradition. In the Jewish tradition, you would hear of Pentecost as Shavuoth or the Feast of Weeks. That really means that it is the feast of Harvest or the First Fruits. That particular festival is all about taking a portion of the season's first harvest, which God had blessed them with, and giving it back for the common good.

The other thing about this festival is it is centered on the day of Passover, the day that the Lord led the Hebrew people out of bondage in Egypt. It was fifty days after they had left Egypt that the Lord gave to Moses the Torah, or the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture, or what we call the Holy Bible.

You should begin to see a recurring theme here around the number five or fifty. It is fifty days after Passover that Shavuot is celebrated. Just as the Hebrew people received the Power of God’s word in the Torah after coming out of Egypt, those first disciples received the power of the Holy Spirit after the death and resurrection of Jesus: a sort of first fruits of the pouring out of God’s Spirit.

Just what is this Spirit? And how does it empower these men and women to go from hiding to sharing the amazing story of Jesus? As we heard in Acts, this Spirit is a force or source of power coming from God, but rather than being meant to seize control of and limit these first-generation Christians, it is a force that emboldens them to go from a small upper room out into the world to share and show how this power of God has begun to change the world. It even has the power to overcome sin and death. How cool is that?

So, the disciples are there in Jerusalem where they had been gathering daily since Jesus had been crucified and buried, it is the same room where Jesus had appeared to them after his resurrection and told them specifically to wait until the Holy Spirit came, which was on that day of Pentecost. That day of celebrating the receiving of God's Holy Word, this day, these disciples would now receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit. The three natures of God are now fully given. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

Now, these disciples have been equipped with the necessary tools to go and bear witness to this almighty power of God, the risen Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the call to follow after the one who is called the Lord of love. This message was not just meant to be shared with the local Jerusalem men and women, but indeed, it was a message that God intended to be shared with the whole world.

That is why on this day of Pentecost, the disciples get lit up by the Holy Spirit, and they begin to speak in other tongues, other languages not their own. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamian, Cappadocian, Asian, Egyptian, Libyan, Rome, and even Arabian. The power of the Holy Spirit is that these men and women are given the bold power that most people still today struggle to accept, and that is to bear witness to the resurrected Christ. Let me put it another way. It is to bear witness to God's Power of love overcoming sin and death and thus creating within all who will believe, a new and right spirit. But that is the transformative power of God. It is a power that is meant to change the world for the better. Amen?

Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians; ***“now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are a variety of services but the same Lord; and a variety of activities but the same God who activates them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”***

What that means is that for every person who will put their faith and trust in this power of the Holy Spirit, which is nothing less than the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love moving through us, then each one of us will embody that Spirit with our own unique set of gifts. We all have different gifts that are meant for building up the body of Christ, but we all share in the same Spirit that emboldens us to use them for that purpose. When we do that, it strengthens the church.

To some, the gift of wisdom is given, to others knowledge, still to others faith, or healing. In other words, there are all kinds of gifts that God blesses us with, but they are all empowered by the Holy Spirit.

You see, God's purpose in bestowing upon us His Holy Spirit is so that we may take whatever gifts we have been given, either naturally or through what we have learned, and use them to help put away our divisive natures and bring us into one. One body, one community, one people working together for the common good of all.

Unfortunately, at least from my generation and up, many of us have not learned that lesson very well. Some even preach against it, proclaiming a religion of separation, divisiveness, and hatred. Some will use their talents, their giftedness to break down people rather than the barriers that exist between us and instill fear rather than trust.

In our communities, just as in our churches, if we are not using our gifts and talents which are blest by the Spirit of God, for the purpose of building up the body of Christ and the building up of the communities in which we live, then pray to tell, what are we using them for?

As Paul says, all of our gifts, our talents, are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one, so it is with Christ, for in the one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body. We are all made to drink of one Spirit.

Members of God's universal church, what are you doing with the gifts that have been given to you? Going forward, what will you do with what has been given to you not only from this church? But from God Himself?

Can we learn to see past our differences, and our prejudices, which have taught us to see not just the world but maybe even one another in a negative way so that we can learn to work together for God's greater purpose?

If we can take the lesson that Nemo teaches the fish caught in the net if we can all learn to swim together, what great things can we accomplish?

As we leave this sacred ground today, Pentecost Sunday, I pray that the Holy Spirit has lit you up. I pray that it has empowered you to use the gifts, the talents, the resources that are available to you in whatever forms that may be to build up the Kingdom of God, which is the body of Christ, the church, For the church is not about any one person or any one pastor save Jesus Christ himself. He came that we all may have eternal life through his holy grace.

With a grace that saves us and a Holy Spirit that empowers us, what else do we need? Oh, maybe this, we do not do this for ourselves or just our little church, we are called to do it for God's greater purpose, a purpose meant to be a blessing for one and all. Amen. For that is what this day of the spirit was and is still all about.