

**Bible Study**  
**Pentecost, Year A**  
**June 4, 2017**

[RCL] Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-35; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23

**Acts 2:1-21**

The Holy Spirit empowers people in many different ways, but these gifts carry with them a responsibility to share them with others. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit gives some the ability to withstand great trials and adversity (look at the Judges) and others inspiration to see great truths (see the Prophets), and here the Holy Spirit gave Jesus' disciples the ability to speak to and be understood by the people of scattered nations and languages – a kind of reversal of the Tower of Babel story.

But if the disciples or anyone else takes their gifts and keeps them to themselves, they are wasted. The Good News that God has given us is likewise wasted if we do not then share it with others and welcome them into finding the love of each other and love of God to which we are all called.

It is not enough, however, to share God's Word with those who are like us, think the way we think, and speak the way we speak. God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost points to our responsibility to share our gifts and our love with those who are different from us. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples the power to literally speak to others in their own language, but we can also approach people where they are in life. We cannot place the burden on others to cross cultural, social, and language barriers to find us – God empowers us to stand up and bring the gifts of the Spirit to them.

- Where are the barriers that keep you from loving others?
- In what ways are you empowered to go out into the world and love others?

**Psalm 104:25-35**

Looking for God's presence and God's love in the world around us can be a great habit to form. Noticing God in the world is just like exercising: It is an easy habit to pick up if you commit to it, and it adds to your life; but it is an easy habit to fall out of in a world where it is easy to just let it get away from you. It is easy to get trapped into thinking about God only when God is being explicitly mentioned, and fall into a habit of not thinking about God while you are out in the everydayness of our world full of pressing concerns.

As with exercising, do not start out too ambitiously and turn it into a dreaded chore. It really only takes a small moment to recognize God in something: the beauty and majesty of the sea, the breath on your lips, a smile from someone at the store. In time, these small moments become a

habit and you will automatically start noticing God in the world around you. It is not that God has become more present, but that you have been recognizing what has been there all along. The times that are the most difficult in life are the times you will appreciate having developed the habit of seeing God in your life, because it is in times of great crisis when we are the least prepared to start the work of seeing God's presence and love, and yet it is then we need to see it most of all.

- Where have you noticed God's presence or God's love out in the world today?
- Ask yourself tomorrow where you notice God's presence or God's love.

### **1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

We live in a world that often prizes individualism more than community. People will tell you that you should be more proud of an accomplishment if you did it without the help of others – that somehow going it alone makes the work superior. This can, unfortunately, lead to an impression that needing help is a bad thing and, also unfortunately, leads people not to ask for help when they need it.

There is more work that needs to be done in this world than any of us can do alone. That should not be taken as a sign of our inadequacy as human beings, but as a sign that God intended us to be in community with one another, deeply living into our relationships with God and with each other. That we are all gifted in different ways is no accident, because we are less beneficial to people who are like us than to people who are different from us; we can help overcome each other's challenges and empower each other's strengths – and in so doing the entire community can become a stronger body of people.

Our goal in life should not be to become self-sufficient and not need others. Instead, our goal in life should be to recognize what gifts we have to offer the world and also, importantly, to recognize what gifts we have in those around us. The sharing of everyone's gifts of the Spirit knits together the Body of Christ.

- What of yourself can you offer those around you today?
- How are you receiving someone else's gifts of the Spirit offered to you?

### **John 20:19-23**

We are all subject to doubt sometimes. The story that follows John 20:19-23 is the story of "Doubting Thomas," where Jesus implores Thomas not to let doubt get the better of him.

Carefully look at today's story, though. Notice that the other disciples also have trouble believing in Christ's return. It is not until they actually get to see Christ's wounds that they believe what they are seeing, rejoice, and really see Jesus (v. 20). Even after all the miracles they witnessed –

the healings, the walking on water, the raising of Lazarus from the dead – they still struggled with doubt.

The question, then, is not whether or not we are going to be subject to doubt, but instead, what we are going to do about it. Jesus tells his disciples to go out into the world, challenging them not to let their doubts get the better of them. When we are going out into the world and forgiving others – loving others and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ – we are not letting doubts get the better of us. God knows that it is hard to do sometimes, which is why we have had the Holy Spirit breathed upon us. We have been empowered to struggle with doubts and still be the loving, rejoicing, forgiving, disciples Christ called us to be.

- Where are doubts stopping you from loving or forgiving others?
- Where can you find strength to keep loving and forgiving despite those doubts?

*Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*