

Year B – 6th Sunday of Easter – 06 May 2018

Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

The last few weeks, for the last month, as a matter of fact, we have been celebrating the Easter season. We have been thinking about our faith with the perspective from just outside that open and empty tomb. Like Mary Magdalene and the other disciples, we have been encouraged, and given ample time, to discover our part of this brave new world we inhabit as we get used to knowing and believing that Jesus Christ loved us so much that he died for our sins and then, he rose from the dead giving us the gift of eternal life to go along with that forgiveness of sins.

That really is a lot to take in. It is pretty amazing, and almost unreal. However, it is true, and it is ours to believe – if we choose.

The last month and a bit has been our time in which to make that choice and to come to terms with how our eternal, or forever, lives are changed, in light of this incredible gift Jesus has given us.

Today marks a shift though. We are still technically in the Easter season, but a new direction has slipped into our Scripture. There is a newly introduced addition that we are getting hints of this morning, and it leads us to walk into what comes next – what comes after we have cottoned on to what we get as the privilege of sharing in eternal life with Jesus Christ.

That addition is the Holy Spirit we are beginning to hear about and the truth God needs us to face in the here and now before we can even get to the ever after.

In a couple of weeks, on Pentecost Sunday, we will hear about that miraculous and world-changing moment when people of all nations began to hear the truth of Jesus Christ spoken in their own tongues. That is the moment when the Holy Spirit descends upon Peter and the other disciples and they, who were scared and locked in their rooms for fear of the Jews not so long ago, are given the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit, allowing them – prompting them – to tell others about the Good News of Jesus Christ that is theirs for the believing.

But before we can get to Pentecost and the shocking indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the disciples speak that Good News in tongues, which they normally can't speak, we hear some gentle promptings that introduce the idea of the Holy Spirit and which give the disciples, and us, a hint of what is to come. A glimpse as to what will be expected of them next, and of us now!

In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear something that might astound some of those who have been in the Church for a long time. Peter, who has always been a bit plodding and playing catch up to Jesus in his ability to follow, is speaking to people who have not been followers of Judaism, let alone followers of Jesus, and he is recognizing that as he speaks the Holy Spirit is falling upon those who are listening to him. They haven't yet been baptized into Jesus Christ and they are being moved by the Spirit to become baptized!

If you think about how we have experienced Church for a very long time, not always but for as long as most of us can remember, the tradition of the Anglican Church has been to bring infants to the Church Community for baptism and then *that is when we think about the Spirit beginning to work in their lives*. Not so always – sometimes the Holy Spirit (maybe more often than we realize) is working in someone's heart long before we are even aware that they are before us.

In Peter's case, there were Gentiles (in our world the gentiles would be those who don't believe in Church the way we do) who had already recognized that something new was happening and they were ready, willing, and through the Spirit, able to hear this Good News of Jesus Christ and were desiring of baptism into his love.

There they were – right in front of the disciples – waiting for someone, who would be sent by God – to talk to them, to share their faith and to invite them into the “group”. They didn't look like the disciples. They didn't sound like the disciples. They wouldn't have eaten the same things or voted in politics the same way, and yet there they were, waiting for an invitation to come and see, and even more importantly, waiting for an invitation to come and believe.

In the Epistle of John, our second lesson, we are given a further hint about this Spirit that has arrived on the scene. Verse 6 says, “And the Spirit is the one who testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.” In that scene from Acts where Peter is preaching, the onus is *not on Peter*. God is not expecting Peter to go out there and speak so convincingly that people will turn their lives to Christ and seek baptism. Peter is very simply only the conduit through which the Spirit is flowing into those who will listen. On his own, Peter can do nothing, but once the Spirit steps in, Peter just has to be careful not to get in the way!

This is such good news for all of us. We know that we are called to share the Good News with others. We promise in our baptisms, our confirmation, our ordination, if such is the case, that we will work at bringing that Good News to other people. Our third Baptismal Promise is to proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ. In our Confirmation, we renew that very promise. In ordination this becomes our life's work. If you are baptized, you are called. You can't escape that expectation. However, it shouldn't be a daunting or scary expectation.

Like Peter, and like John's epistle, we are not on our own. The Spirit has the words that need to be spoken. The Spirit knows the hearts of those who are yearning and growing closer to embracing the Truth that is Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is not to convince or cajole or bribe or browbeat. Our responsibility is to be open to those relationships and opportunities that God places in our lives where we are able, with the Spirit's help, to do exactly what Jesus has commanded in his Gospel: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

The Gospel this morning has given us that clue we've been waiting for all along. When we struggle to figure out how we, as Anglicans of stiff upper lip, sometimes shy about sharing our faith, can trust in the Spirit and indeed, reach out to others with the intent of telling them, as well as showing them, that Jesus Christ is their savior too, we need to see them not as people who we have to convince, but rather to look at them as Jesus looks at us: He said, “You are my friends ... if you do what I command you ... I have called you friends ...”

We are called to build relationships – both in this place and outside of it – so that it won't be to a bunch of scary strangers that we fear the Spirit is calling us – but rather to people we know, and love and respect, because we have gotten to know them as friends. When we attempt to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to people with whom we already have a relationship, we will find that the Spirit has already paved the way. Ours is to recognize the people God has placed in our paths who are seeking, even if we aren't aware of their desire yet. When they see the way, the Spirit moves in our lives, they will be able to trust us as friends that when they come to that font for their own Baptismal Promises, or renewal of old ones, they will be in the midst of a loving family. They will know the truth that in Christ we never walk alone.