

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Pentecost, June 9, 2019.

Fifty days after Easter. The coming of the Holy Spirit. Act 3 of the Creator's Love for the Creation.

Act 1: Let there be light.

Act 2: Let there be Jesus, the Creator Incarnate.

Act 3: Let there be the Holy Spirit, the on-going presence of the Creator.

Not three separate beings. But one Being – capital B – engaging the Creation in a variety of ways, but with the same two-fold purpose: accept the love and share the love.

The highlight of this event, as described in the **Book of Acts (2:1-21)**, are people of many backgrounds and languages being overwhelmed by some kind of singular power, but in their own language. What kind of singular power could accomplish this? No wonder the people impacted by this event “were amazed.”

And no wonder that this event was indelible. People couldn't forget it. People didn't want to forget it. They didn't understand it, but they couldn't deny it.

What do you think of when you hear the word indelible? Ink. Ink that doesn't come off. And what do you think of when you hear the word ink? Tattoo. Permanent. Colorful. Provocative.

The Church has a version of this. It's called baptism. Remember this phrase from the service of baptism as the minister marks the forehead with the sign of the Cross: “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and marked as Christ's own for ever.”

Sometimes “forever” is one word, as in “forever and a day.” But other times, “for ever” is two words. How long? I'll tell you how long: for ever.” In baptism, “for ever” is two words. Indelible.

So it was on Pentecost. God, as Holy Spirit, dramatically entered the lives of a bunch of people. It was an event that so marked the recipients that the event

was passed on through countless generations. We are the current recipients of this event. Not just as something we read about, but something that we experience first-hand.

Maybe our own Pentecost experience is not overwhelming or indelible. Rather it's a collection of pokes, hints, suggestions, awakenings, epiphanies. Experiences that come unexpectedly and vanish quickly. Or perhaps there is a single experience that changes our direction, changes our life, changes our outlook on the world, on others, on ourselves.

Today we remember an event, but we also are mindful of Pentecost as a way of life. My guess is that there have been times in your life when you have felt Spirit-filled. Not overwhelmed, not knocked down, not blinded, but touched. Maybe you didn't call this touch the Holy Spirit. You probably put it the category of being energized by something or someone. It might have been a moment in time or a bunch of moments strung together. An experience that changed you either momentarily or over time. Something that you couldn't fully understand or explain.

Who knows what or who it might have been. But that's okay. A life without some mystery is rare and such a life can actually be exciting. All those people speaking and hearing in different tongues – they surely didn't understand it all. Which is why our friend St. Peter had to step in and address the situation. "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

Sometimes this is our role, isn't it. Sometimes circumstances cry out for us to intervene, to help, to correct, to clarify. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves us to be a representative for our Lord. Peter reminds us that God acted through Jesus, an "accredited agent of God." And Peter suggests that there are times when God can act through us. You and I as accredited agents. Imagine that.

According to Peter, Jesus was accredited "by miracles and signs." Well, what about us? How are we accredited? Yes, by our baptism. But beyond that, what gives us standing as agents of God? It can't be just that we are baptized. There must be more. If we were applying for a position as an agent of God, what would our resume look like? Whom would we use as references? What progression of

positions would we list? What professional goals would we cite? What minimum compensation would we suggest?

Well, guess what. We don't have to impress God with a resume. We're already on God's team. Draft Day is over. God chose us. In Paul's letter to the Romans (**Romans 8:14-17**), we are reminded that we are adopted. God did the accrediting Himself.

In today's lesson insert, you may have noticed that the lesson from Acts, our first lesson today, was one of two options for the first lesson. The second option was from Genesis (**Genesis 11:1-9**), the Beginning. And here's the first verse of this lesson: "Now the whole earth had one language."

What a contrast with the lesson from Acts, which describes many languages. But what the lesson from Acts also describes is that God found a way of transcending all of these languages. Everybody was touched by One and the Same Spirit. It's as if God restored the original condition. "Now the whole earth had one language AGAIN."

Fast forward to the present day. Yes, we are the objects of God the Holy Spirit. That Spirit touches us. But we are also subjects. We are touched for a purpose, namely to take charge of our own lives, but also to share the love of God with others. We are commissioned. We are accredited. We are agents. And, as our gospel lesson (**John 14:8-17, 25-27**) reminds us, we are promised the Peace of God.

Think of our military academies and our medical schools. Commencement for these vital institutions has two parts: graduation and commissioning; diploma and assignment.

Pentecost is similar. We are touched by the Spirit – the object dimension, and then we are sent by the Spirit – the subject dimension. Sent as accredited agents of the Lord. What an assignment and what an honor and what hard work there will be and what a sense of purpose and joy.

A final thought. When one gets accredited for any task, there is usually continuing education required. Well, this is what you and I do on Sunday

mornings collectively and what we do at other times individually and in small groups. It's called Bible Study. It's called prayer. It's called community service. We renew one another. We feed one another. We keep one another spiritually sharp. Not only to sustain the Holy Spirit in our lives, but to share the Holy Spirit with others in new and exciting ways.

Let there be light. Let there be Jesus. Let there be the Holy Spirit. And then, let there be us. That would be Act 4. Amen.