

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and kindle in us the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.

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Introduction – The Bishop’s Visit on May 9th

A few weeks ago on May 9th, our bishop, John Chane made a visitation to St. James. We had asked that he conduct an Adult Forum. When I spoke with him on the phone, I asked him what his topic would be. He immediately responded, “Pentecost! Are We Ready?” Bishop Chane knew he wanted to talk about the church in this Diocese and what the Holy Spirit is doing in various places that had not been anticipated. But when I heard his title, I couldn’t help but remember several years ago when a member of this congregation commented: *“It always seems to be the case at St. James’ that just when it seems we’re about to really move forward, something will happen and we fall back.”* I wish I had asked that person to explain further what she meant; I would have liked to hear some more concrete examples. I didn’t get that . . . But her comment certainly made me wonder . . . Are we ready for Pentecost at St. James’?

The Pentecost Readings

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost – that Feast Day on our church calendar in which we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to each of us. All our scripture readings this morning reflect this theme. We celebrate this gift of the Holy Spirit, BUT are we ready for Pentecost here at St. James? Or do we just hear these scripture texts from Acts, Romans, and the Gospel of John as nice stories from ages long ago – not having much relevance for today’s church, much less any relevance for any of us individually?

We probably do enjoy the alternative liturgy from the New Zealand Prayer Book that we’re using today, as well as the powerful hymns and the special decorations that make this a Feast Day. But . . . are we ready for Pentecost? Are we ready for the Holy Spirit to abide with us, to teach us and to lead us, much less empower us to change the world around us?

St. James’ the Past Several Weeks

During the past several weeks, the leadership of St. James’ has been immersed in many conversations about where the Holy Spirit might be leading our congregation. We have examined our current demographics, noting the shifts that have occurred over the past ten years. We’ve paid attention to the cultural changes that have occurred in the surrounding community – life just isn’t the same as it was even a decade ago. Through these discussions, we have become very clear that our mission as a congregation is to **“grow committed disciples of Jesus Christ.”** That sounds simple doesn’t it? Isn’t that suppose to be the mission of the church? Isn’t that what Jesus commanded his followers to do: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you”* (Matt 28:19-20); or *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

We know that's the business we're suppose to be about but we haven't always articulated very well just how we go about doing that. As the leadership has discussed these issues over the past few weeks, we have become more and more clear that one way to talk about HOW to do this is by focusing on three overlapping, yet distinct paths (categories/activities) – one member of our vestry has nicknamed these the three “buckets:”

- **Worship** – what we do when we come together as a community, intentionally redirecting our attention away from ourselves and focusing upon God in praise, adoration, and thanksgiving
- **Spiritual Formation** – activities to which we devote time and energy in order to know Christ, learn of him, and be transformed more and more into his image. Sometimes this “bucket” has been called “Christian Education” or “Sunday School.”
- **Service** – how do we now live as Christ's representative in the world, doing the things Jesus did (*the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these . . .*)

We've also become very clear that all of us who claim to be Christian need to be intentionally and actively engaged in all three of these buckets – or walking all three of these paths: worship, spiritual formation, and service – No matter how old we are (whether we're a child or a senior); no matter our background; no matter our physical, emotional, political, vocational, financial, or any other status. Each one of us who seek to be a disciple of Jesus Christ needs to be actively engaged in worship, spiritual formation, and service – that's how the Holy Spirit works in us and through the community to transform us more and more into the image of Jesus – to grow us as disciples.

Changes Are Coming

As the parish leadership has considered all this, we have begun to examine our parish structures, organization, and programs, asking, “How are we actually providing for these three paths of worship, spiritual formation, and service for all our members?” And as we looked at this, we've realized that the status quo is no longer acceptable. 42% of our adult membership can't attend adult formation classes because we don't offer anything at a time when child care is provided. Children, for the most part, get only a smattering of worship because we hold Sunday School during the worship service. We need to do something – the question is what?

In the coming weeks, you will be hearing about some proposed changes (if you haven't already heard). Some may perceive these changes as quite radical, or at the least, very risky. Others may ask why any change is necessary in the first place. Others may wonder why we waited so long to get moving. Regardless of your initial reaction, I ask that you strive as much as possible to hold your opinion in abeyance until you have received and read and thoroughly digested what the proposals actually involve. In other words, wait and see and try to avoid reacting to pieces of a plan when you haven't yet seen the whole of it. Then pray for me as your rector, for our parish leadership, and for our congregation that the Holy Spirit will truly be poured out upon us.

As Anglicans, we believe that we have all been given the gift of the Holy Spirit – we proclaim that truth in baptism, a truth that St. Paul in his letter to the Romans reiterates in today's reading. But someone once commented that for some of us the Holy Spirit is like a pilot light lit in a stove: the fire is there, but the gas is not getting up to the burners to cook the food. Pray that the burners at St. James' will be fired up in all our people, filling us, empowering us, driving out fear, and enabling us to transform our world. That's what happened on the Day of Pentecost, and that's what can happen here at St. James' in the here and now!