



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4794 Curtis Blvd Port St John FL 32729

**Whitsunday (commonly known as Pentecost)
May 31, 2020**

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the sermon is taken from the Book of Acts

“Every man heard them speak in his own language, and they were amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these who speak Galileans. How hear then we every man in our own tongue.....the wonderful works of God”

I have been watching the last few nights and I have been disturbed, saddened and angered by the images of American cities burning because of hatred and selfishness. The last few nights it was Minneapolis and Atlanta and Los Angeles. Just a few years ago, it was Baltimore and St Louis. Sadly, in my life, we have been trapped in a cycle of this self-destructive insanity that played out over the decades in Miami, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Selma, Boston and Detroit and on and on.

The fire that lights man's heart is hatred, rage, meaningless destruction, looting, distrust and fear. The fire of man turns indignation and self importance into the mob that can attack the police officers that are largely there to help them, to loot and burn the businesses that employ and serve them, that emboldens shamelessness so that people who should know and do better flaunt their worst behavior in front of television cameras.

The most disturbing aspect of this behavior is that it is a reflection of our hearts. We have lost the ability to disagree without name calling and demonizing. We have lost our willingness to turn the other cheek. We have lost the courage to offer kindness and good will to those who annoy our sensibilities. We are at the edge of abandoning the civilization that is established on the principles of Christianity. This isn't a generalization about us as a country, or a generation, or some sociologically defined group, but an honest look inward at ourselves, the people in this room and on the end of the camera. It is time for us to check ourselves, to quench the fire of indignation and pride that rages in our hearts and minds.

The fire of God, which we contemplate in our readings today, is given to us specifically to extinguish the fire of man that burns so destructively in our hearts. Moses in his self-righteousness, killed a man for wronging one of his people. In cowardice he ran away and hid, leading his life in exile, and abandoning the purpose for which he had been pulled from the river and saved as a child. Then he encountered the fire of God in the burning bush.

First, he was humbled, take off your shoes and worship, you are on Holy Ground. Then he was sent back from the place he had escaped in fear. He took up his mission he had abandoned and delivered his people. Instead of indignation, he served a people who often did not appreciate him. He trusted in God when things looked hopeless at the Red Sea, in the desert, and when his people turned against him. That is how the fire of God burned within him, consuming his selfishness and fear, and in its place planting sacrifice, courage, patience and virtue.

The Apostles that led the events of this Chapter of Acts were very much people like each of us. They had good intentions, but were faint of heart and of faith. Despite having been told about the Crucifixion and the Resurrection in advance, they abandoned Jesus when the mob came, denied Him, and ran for their lives. Despite being with the Risen Jesus, they tried to abandon their commission and go back to their fishing boats. Despite watching Jesus ascend to heaven to prepare a place for them, and despite being told by angels that He would come back in Glory, they sat huddled together again, praying for help, for a sign to guide them into what they were supposed to do.

It was only when the Holy Spirit touched them as tongues of flame, that they could rise up to the mission they had been given. The Holy Ghost set their lives on fire. His message to the Apostles was, you already know what you are supposed to do; stop procrastinating, stop worrying, stop doubting yourselves. Get up and do what you were told to do. You were given the commission to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just go and do it.

By the fire of Holy Ghost, their lives burned with courage, sacrifice and faith as they went to their appointed ministries. Where they had been afraid, they now preached with courage, and in the same place and to the same people who had murdered their Lord and Savior. They had every reason to believe that they too would be murdered for their witness, and yet they stood their ground, they took the punishments that accompanied their ministry, even when it meant exile or martyrdom.

While the transformation of courage and certitude in the Apostles was miraculous, it was not the only miracle of the day. Each person hearing them heard them in their own tongue. That right, the hearers of the message were also transformed by the fire of the Holy Ghost. It did not happen that Peter spoke Greek, and John spoke Aramaic, and Philip spoke Persian. The each spoke in their Galilean tongue, a dialect that crowd recognized, and yet in the ear of each person, the words were transformed into the hearer's language. Not only were the words translated grammatically, the hearer's proclaim that the Apostles preached the "wonderful works of God". That phrase doesn't mean simply that the Good News was spoken, it means that belief and an appreciation of the love and glory of God was transmitted to the heart as well as to the ear.

That is how the Holy Ghost works. Personally. The tongue of flame that touched each Apostle was a personal fire. They didn't all react to a single torch. The flame of inspiration and transformation touched each one. Peter was transformed though he denied Jesus. John was transformed from the beloved Apostle to the Apostle of Love. Thomas's transformation was specific to his skepticism. They had courage in common, and faith in common, but the transformative power of the Holy Ghost played out in the intimate, personal and unique details of their lives.

That is the way the Holy Ghost works in our lives as well. We don't get guiding stars, angel choirs, thunderous voices or billboard sized signs in the sky. We get the still quiet miracles that bring peace of mind and certainty and resolve. It is the miraculous intersection of people and timing that is so peculiar, unique and intimate to our doubts and fears that we cannot deny the miraculous nature of the encounters. The Holy Ghost speaks to us in

the tongue of the people to whom we minister and with whom we witness the Good News.

By nature, we are hopeless whiners, just as the Jews that followed Moses were. We all complain that we don't know what God has in store for us. We complain that He just won't speak clearly and tell us what he wants us to do. Here we are, stuck with crappy jobs, ungrateful families and friends, and unreliable bodies, living awful lives while we wait for the billboard of God to crash into our windshields with the message of what it is that God wants us to do. But the Holy Ghost is already here, already talking to us, already transforming us into not only faithful witnesses, but Saints.

The Holy Ghost is the still quiet voice in our awful jobs, and ungrateful relationships and unreliable bodies. When we pray for direction, He tells us to just open our eyes. We are where we are supposed be; to minister and heal and forgive and love to the people that surround us. If we offer up the inconvenience of our lives, the disappointment of our lives, the hurt in our lives as a prayer and a sacrifice and humbly love and help those people we think aren't worthy of our attention, then we too will know and experience the wonderful works of God and be transformed by them.

There are tongues of fire poised above each of our heads right now. There are miracles of timing and revelation, forgiveness and love that await every one of us profoundly. Powerful and personally. The fire of the Holy Ghost is sitting next to you now, or will be sitting next to you sometime today. As we prepare for Communion, let's include in our prayers the wisdom to see Jesus in our neighbors. The voice of the Holy Ghost is in our ear, ready to burst with the incredible news of the wonderful works of God in our specific, particular, individual lives. If we reach out with courage as the Apostles did, and witness the love of Jesus by loving the seemingly inconvenient, annoying and ungrateful people around us, we will hear the Word of God, in our own tongue, for our own lives. We are the recipients and the bearers of the transcending fire of God. Let's be courageous, kind, powerful in the Spirit and we will transform the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen