

By the power of the Holy Spirit

A sermon preached by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on Whitsunday, the Day of Pentecost, May 23, 2010.

All who are lead by the Spirit of God are children of God.

Romans 8:14

*Come Holy Spirit and touch our lips that we may proclaim your word.
Come Holy Spirit, power from on high, make us agents of peace and righteousness.*

The event of that first Pentecost brought into being a very frightened and scattered community. They lacked guidance and direction. It was on that day that God's Holy Spirit took charge and commissioned them to be the church, the visible presence of Christ in the world. From that moment on the course of history would never again be the same.

Pentecost is the third of the great festivals of the church year of equal importance with Christmas and Easter. It marks the close of the fifty-day period after Easter. This feast day is taken from the Jewish festival of the Feast of Weeks held seven weeks after Passover to commemorate the giving of the law by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. That marked the foundation of the Jewish faith just as Pentecost marked the foundation of the Christian Church. This day is also known as Whitsunday because of the white garments worn by the baptized in celebration of the faith into which they are made members.

The Apostles were empowered through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To be inspired is to breathe in. The disciples were inspired as they "breathed in" the power and the freshness of the Holy Spirit. Breath and the wind are the outward and visible signs of the Holy Spirit to empower us to act in God's name. The Greek for breath is *pneuma*, from which we get the words pneumatic and pneumonia, which have to do with air and breath. The Hebrew for wind is *ruach*, referring to an invisible, but powerful force we cannot see, but whose effects we can see. Whether you are on board a sailing vessel or standing on the beach, there is nothing like the bracing effects of a powerful wind.

Another image of the Spirit is fire, which is why the altar and vestments are red today. Fire is one of the most basic elements of nature that generates power. That immeasurable power generated by the Holy Spirit present at the creation continues in our daily lives. When we feel strongly enough about an issue we get "fired up" and are determined to do something about it.

We all need a sense of power and control over our lives and want to make something of our lives and the lives of others. Power has the capacity to do great good, or it can be corrupted and do great harm. We get into deep trouble when we misuse power we do not have or when we think we are in charge when we're not. We have to beware of the temptation to engage in power games and those who engage in them. The true source of power ultimately comes from God through the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we are the bearers of light for the world wherever we are, making way for peace, justice and reconciliation among all God's people.

We draw our authority from scripture, from tradition, from our reasoning powers as well as from our own personal experience. Without the use of our God-given ability to reason, our faith would be nothing more than following a set of rules. God gives us our minds to think to do the right thing in each and every situation.

Today as we honor and recognize those who received the laying on of hands by the bishop in confirmation yesterday in Saint Paul's Cathedral in Boston. Hanna, Kendra, Karl, Corey, Ryan,

Craig and Kathryn are strengthened in the same power of the Holy Spirit given at your baptism. They have taken on the vows and responsibilities of membership in the church that were taken for you by your sponsors in baptism. They are now commissioned to represent Christ and the church wherever they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel in who they are wherever they may be.

This morning, we welcome Catherine Melanie Loiars, who is being made a full member of Christ's church through baptism. Her sponsors are taking on the vows and promises of church membership until she is able to take them on for herself at Confirmation. She will need the love and support of all of us as she grows into the full understanding of what it means to be in Christ.

We are all charged to continue in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and in our prayers; to persevere in resisting evil and when we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord; to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ; to seek and serve all people, loving and respecting others as we love and respect ourselves and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

It is up to us in this congregation to support those who have renewed their vows. The same Holy Spirit who empowered the disciples in the formation of the early Christian community leads us. The early Christian community was sustained in times of great persecution and tribulation. The Holy Spirit empowers us to see a wrong and make it right, to seek justice for those who live on the margins. It is by God's most Holy Spirit that we come to terms with the ignorance and fear that lead to sexism, racism and homophobia and to challenge the status quo and be part of eradicating injustice as we work to insure the dignity of every human being. That power enables us to make the right use of God's gifts of this earth to resist sacrificing the environment on the altar of economics.

It is by the power of God's Holy Spirit shaping our minds, our hearts and our values that we come to know it means to belong to this great commonwealth of God known as the church. Pray for the church that that we may reform it where it is wrong, reunite it where it is divided, and strengthen it where it is right. We do this in the name of Christ and in the power of God's most Holy Spirit whom we celebrate this day.

Come, Holy Spirit, Creator of the universe, and renew the face of the earth.

Come, Holy Spirit, breath of God, and make us a living people, holy and free.

Come, Holy Spirit, wisdom and truth: strengthen us in the risk of faith.