



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Whitsunday (commonly known as Pentecost)
Sunday May 24, 2015**

**✠ 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 a very good friend who called me last week to share an account of the how the Holy Spirit miraculously intervened in his life. My friend has a son who is a heroin addict. As many of you know, having an addict in the family is destructive in many ways. The pursuit of the desired substance changes people we love into liars and thieves, makes them slaves to the relentless pursuit of their addiction at the expense of every person in their lives, and especially those who love them the most. My friend's family has gone through hell with their beloved child for several years.

One of the consequences of the family distress was that my friend, who has always been a faithful Christian, felt unsupported in his parish and went looking for a new church. He would up at Crossroads, an evangelical mega church, because the Church had collected thousands of pounds of rice and beans which was given to a heroin recovery program that supported addicts in the region as they left treatment or incarceration. Even so, the Church was so big that he had no relationship with the pastor, and he was about to leave when an Elder talked to him and said, the blessing that comes from this church is from participating in these projects. Try getting involved in a project before you give up on us.

My friend agreed, and set up a gardening and beautification project for the cities youth related programs like the Y and the Boy's and Girl's clubs. They advertised his project in the Church announcements and bulletins. As the work day approached, my friend expected he would have his family and a few folks that reached out to him join him in a day of digging and planting and picking up trash.

He drove to the Center where the volunteers were being staged and found he was leading a force of nearly 1500 people. My friend was so overwhelmed at the outpouring of love from this church that he sat on the floor and cried.

The group set out and worked at several facilities all day. They were a blessing every where they went. My friend visited each facility and checked with the facility Director to see how things were going. The very last place he visited that day, the Director came out to thank him and they began to talk. The Director asked my friend which church he represented, and asked him why he had joined it. My friend answered that his son was a heroin addict and he had joined the church because of what the Church had done for the recovering addicts program in the Region.

The Director reached over and put her hand on my friend's shoulder and said, “Have hope. People can recover from their addictions.” My friend broke down in tears for the second time that day, and confessed back to the woman that he had lost hope. The toll on his family had been so great, and the statistics against recovery were so overwhelming that he did not know what to do any more. In fact, he said through his tears, he hadn't spoken to his son for four months because he just did not know what to say to him.

The woman he was talking to pulled a necklace from inside her shirt, and it held a coin. She said, “I got this coin this morning, 5 years sober, I am a heroin addict.”

My friend went home and called his son, and they went to dinner, and while the boy is still an addict, today his father has hope that he might be good, be clean someday, and he is supporting the boy emotionally and spiritually in a way he had believed he could never do again.

This is the work of the Holy Ghost. The miracle that a man with no hope, but offering his day in the name of Christ would meet a person struggling against all odds to be sober and clean one more day, and that they would inspire each other to have faith in a God who knew them so well,

loved them so much, that he would go to the lengths of this day's events to bring them together.

The Apostles that lead 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, 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, paralyzed, praying for help, and a sign, to guide them into what they were supposed to do.

When the Holy Spirit touched them as tongues of flame, He was setting 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. To their everlasting credit, the Apostles accepted that gift. They were lit with the fire of Holy Ghost, and their lives burned with courage and 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 where their Lord and Savior had been murdered. 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 the lesser miracle of the day. The really important miracle was that each person hearing them heard them in their own tongue.

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 witness was transformed into the hearer's language. Not only were the words translated generally, 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. The crowd didn't just hear the Gospel in their own language, they heard it preached in their own hearts and souls.

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 with respect to the care of Mary. Thomas's transformation was specific to hid 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 my friend experienced. 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 that we minister to and witness the Good News.

By nature, we are hopeless whiners. 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, unreliable friends, living awful lives while we wait for the billboard of God to crash into our windshields with the message of what 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 families and unreliable friends. When we pray for direction, He tells us to just open our eyes. We are where is where we are supposed to minister and heal and forgive and love. 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 time, 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 as profoundly and powerfully as the revelation my friend had digging gardens in the name of Jesus. The face of the Holy Ghost is sitting next to you now, or will be sitting next to you sometime today. As we pray today, let's remember to pray for 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, witness the love of Jesus in the love we give to the inconvenient and ungrateful people around us, then we will hear the Word of God, in our own tongue, for our own lives.

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