

Trinity Church
May 4, 2008

Easter 7
RCL, Year A, Easter 7

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.

Amen.

This Sunday, the Sunday after the Ascension, we stand between our remembrance of our Lord's ascension into heaven and his glorification at the right hand of God, and Pentecost, next Sunday's remembrance of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. This valley, as it were, between two mountain tops, two momentous events, gives us the space in which to stop, catch our breath, and pray.

When we remember Jesus' ascension, we immediately turn to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus makes it clear that his glorification is at hand; that he will leave them; but that his ministry and mission is now theirs. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth."

After the ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives; they went to the upper room, and they devoted themselves to constant prayer. I take this prayer to have been a critical time of turning away from Christ, his words and deeds, and turning to themselves as witnesses to Christ and as doers of deeds even more loving and compassionate than those of Jesus himself. Jesus said to them, "Greater deeds than these will you do *because* I go to the Father."

This must have been an intense time of decision, decision to take up the Christian life, the life in Christ, and to live it faithfully, without giving up or turning back. A conscious decision to be an instrument of God's grace in the world, extending forgiveness and healing to others, and a conscious decision to take up the cross as Simon of Cyrene had done, and to lift it high, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore his sacred Name. For this deep prayer to be answered, the gift of the Holy Spirit would have to fall upon them. They could not do this on their own; the Spirit of Christ himself must be with them and in them. So, they prayed in that upper room, "Come, Holy Spirit, come."

And lastly, the Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that this is not some sort of general waiting upon the Holy Spirit. This was the specific act of real people: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon and Jude, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Jesus' brothers, and other women. Each specifically praying. All praying together.

It is not hard to guess what they prayed for, how they opened themselves to God and to God's grace. They prayed what we pray when we ask God's Spirit to come upon those who are baptized. "Sustain us, Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us a discerning heart that yearns to know you fully. Give us courage always to do your will on earth as you do God's will in heaven. Give us a spirit to love you. But most of all, give us what you gave Jesus, the spirit of joy and wonder in all your works." That is exactly what they prayed for. A new life.

All during this Easter season, Joe Rushton has been meeting with and praying with those among us who feel God's Spirit moving within them, urging them, calling them to be disciples. They seek nothing less than a new life, a new heart and soul that only Christ can give them as they give themselves to him.

And this is not some general sort of commitment. This is the specific commitment of specific people: Max Adler, Michael Close, Sandra Hibbs, Angela Hinson, Melissa Jenkins, Jean Close, and Annette Hestres. This coming Saturday, the Eve of Pentecost, they will come before the bishop at 10 a.m. at the Church of the Redeemer, giving themselves to God, asking for the Holy Spirit to amend their lives. So, we pray: "Give them a discerning heart that yearns to know God fully. Give them courage to be a Christian. Help them to persevere and give the gift of joy and wonder in all your works."

The disciples in the Upper Room, our parishioners here today. There is no difference or distinction. The Spirit is at work in us. It is a joy and a wonder to behold.