

**PENTECOST – TELLING THE STORY**  
**Feast of Pentecost – May 15, 2005**  
**The Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close – Grace Church, Haddonfield**

The Feast of Pentecost is celebrated today. It is one of the major feasts of the Church. Today we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the one Jesus said would come to help us. But there is a reality that we must come to terms with today. There is a major shift that takes place on Pentecost. The ministry of God shifts from Jesus alone to us. No longer can we depend on Jesus to do it all. Now it is up to us.

Ten days ago, we celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. This marked Jesus' being taken into the essence of God to sit at his right hand. Now Jesus Christ is filled with the power of God. But this transition is completed with Pentecost. The story of Pentecost in the Book of Acts notes that the disciples were filled with a new power. The Spirit gave them the ability to speak in different languages to tell others about the miracle of God accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Paul writes in Corinthians about how the Spirit brings different gifts for different ministries to take place in the Church and the world. Now it is up to us to take up where Jesus left off. In the Gospel of John, the evangelist marks the moment of Pentecost with the words of Jesus, "Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, SO NOW I SEND YOU!" There is no getting around it. We are to take up the ministry of Jesus ourselves.

There are three things that we are to be about as Christians. First, we are to worship God. That's what we are doing here today. Each week, we gather at Grace Church to worship God. But it doesn't end here. There is more that has to mark who we are as the people of God. Second, we are called to serve God. This means taking the gifts that God has given us to serve God in the name of Jesus Christ. We are to discern the gifts we have been given and look for the way to use them in God's name. Finally, we are to proclaim what we believe. We are to tell others what Good News has come into our lives through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This last one, proclaiming, is perhaps the hardest one to do. We are not used to sharing our faith. There is that dreaded word that strikes fear in the hearts of Episcopalians everywhere to summarize this action ...evangelism! Why is it so hard for us to share with others how God is part of our lives? It's really not that hard. It's as simple as telling a story!

You know what stories are like, don't you? How many of us, as parents, read the same story over and over to our children. For me, it was "Curious George." I think I can recite it by heart now! Think of all the family stories we share when friends and family meet. Have your parents or relatives ever recited, over and over, some adventure that involved you at a younger age? I can tell by the smiles among you that you know of what I speak!

Talking about our faith is as simple as telling a story. Where have you met God recently? What prayer was answered for you? How has Jesus made a difference in your life? Why are you here at Grace Church today? What does it mean for you to be a Christian? You

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don't need a theological education or to have read the Bible from cover-to-cover three times. It's as simple as telling another person, in your own words, how God or Jesus has made a difference to you. Why is that so hard for us? Maybe, with a little practice, we could do it quite easily!

Yesterday, I officiated at a funeral in a Church in North Philadelphia. I visited the place earlier in the week to become oriented to the place. The grounds were beautiful! The Church was built in the early 1800's, and could seat twice as many people as we can now. There was a separate building that housed both an auditorium and parish hall. A third building housed a pretty chapel, the offices and the classrooms. What a place! They even had their own parking lot! Wow!

I got a clue that things were not well at this Episcopal Church. I tried to contact the priest to speak about conducting the service. It was a challenge because he only worked here part-time. The parish secretary was only in the office two days a week. These were not good signs! When I finally got the priest, he was more concerned with telling me about the rules and regulations for the church. I learned more about the people and the place from the sexton during my visit (and he was a Roman Catholic!).

The sexton shared how few people worshipped at the Church anymore. It was a struggle just to open the doors. They didn't use the spaces with community and only occasional events took place on the grounds. They had their own cemetery, but were considering opening it up to non-parishioners to earn money! What kind of story was being said, on not said, about this Church? What were the members sharing with others? I suspect, not much ... if anything.

After the funeral, a parishioner shared with me how nice it was to have so many people in the Church. She added that they were a "dying" Church. I was stunned by that comment. She added that they only had one child in their church school. There wasn't much of life left here, and I doubt much service and little proclamation. I looked at the woman and told her it was up to her and the other members to bring the Church back to life. I added that if each one of them brought a friend to Church, they could double the attendance at worship. At least that would be a start. Someone came up asking for directions to the reception, so our conversation ended. I thought this was a stark contrast to the people who shared in the service about the woman who had died and how much life she infused into the congregation.

Are we a "living" or a "dying" Church? I would like to ask all the children here today to stand up on the pews. Take a look around at how many young faces we have! This is one sign of life! We have to teach these children how to use the gifts of the Spirit. We are to worship, serve and proclaim! That will continue to grow this Church for years to come!

Pentecost invites us to receive and share the Spirit. We are to take up where Jesus left off. It's up to us now! The Spirit will help us. Jesus is always with us. But it is not

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enough for us to just be in these pews on Sunday mornings. We must serve, and even more important today, we must share our stories of faith with others! I challenge each of you to proclaim your faith with just one person this week. Don't be afraid; just share a story with another person. Pentecost is the beginning of our being the Church. Now let's make a difference in the name of our God and in the name of Jesus Christ. When we do, we will discover just how alive our church and faith can be! God bless you and good luck!