

Sermons at St. Luke's

A sermon preached by The Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copple on Sunday, June 12, 2011.

(Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:19-23)

The Lord be with you. [And also with you.] How did you know that was the line? Did it just sort of pop out of your mouth like a reflex? Like the doctor giving a little hammer on your knee? It just popped out there, didn't it? Now, there's no danger, is there, is that such important words such as "The Lord be with you, and also with you" could be used in a perfunctory, less than thoughtful way, say, at -- oh, I don't know -- a church picnic, where someone can't gather the attention of all the Episcopalians in the room. So they clink a glass and yell out, "The Lord be with you!" This crowd responds, "And also with you." "Agnes will now explain the buffet line." These important words, "The Lord be with you, and also with you," do we stop and think about the amazing reality of saying that God is with us? Do we stop and think about what that means, especially here on the day of Pentecost?

Now, in the great calendar of the church, 50 days ago it was the resurrection. The Risen Lord was clearly, tangibly in flesh with His disciples. They could touch Him, they could embrace Him, they could see the wounds, the Lord was with them. And then 40 days later, they see their Lord and then He ascends into heaven and they are abandoned? Well, it sure looked like that we were abandoned. He ascends into heaven, and where is He? And then follow the words of Jesus who says, "Wait for me. Wait for it, because it is coming. I, the Lord, will be with you always." And so they wait. And they wait in that upper room in Jerusalem, and they wait for the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, ten days after the ascension. They wait, and then a mighty wind comes among them, tongues of flame are over their head and they are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

How many of you really want the Holy Spirit to come in to your home as a mighty wind? I'm thinking that would be terrifying, especially given the kind of spring that we've had here in the south. A mighty wind changes you, buffets you, could knock you over, can upend your whole life. And it does. And there by the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon those apostles, they are changed. The mighty wind changes them. These disciples who so often got it wrong -- James and John wanting to know where they get to sit at the heavenly banquet, on the right or the left; Peter who says, "Well, then don't wash my feet, wash my whole body," Peter you're not getting it; Thomas who doubts; all the disciples who so often don't say the right thing are all of a sudden filled with the Spirit that gives them the power to say the words that the world needs to hear. The power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus leaves that the Holy Spirit may come and what? Be with us, dwell with us, tell us that Jesus the Lord, God the Father, is with us yet by the power of the Holy Spirit. This little word "with;" God with us makes all the difference.

Now, I don't know about you St. Luke's, I know about myself. I like to go do things for people. Let me go do something for you. I'll rake your yard. I'll bring you a meal. I will be happy to do something for you. Or if you feel voiceless and powerless, I will go stand up for you. But when you think about the people who are willing to do for you or speak for you, and then you think

about those who are willing to be with you. To be with you, to be not just with you but a vessel of the Holy Spirit's presence, this is the kind of God we worship, the God who says, "I will be with you always. I will never abandon you." The Lord be with you.

But if we cannot see Jesus Christ with us, where do we look? Well, sometimes we look to prayer. "God be with us, but while you're with me, would you do these things for me?" God the vending machine. "I need 53-C done for me today." A little wish list of what we want God to do for us. Or God the auto mechanic. "I just need a tune up, Lord. Oh, no, Lord, I need an overhaul." We are really interested in a God that will do things for us. Jesus, after all, saved us on the cross. But Jesus saved us to change us. Jesus didn't come to fix us, he came to re-create us. And it is when we look at one another in ministry being present to one another, there we see Jesus. We are the body of Christ. Do we stop enough to think about the powerful presence of God in our lives, in our bodies, in our actions to be with and for one another?

Do we stop and think about what we're going to do to Andrew today? We are going to baptize him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are going to seal him and mark him by the power of the Holy Spirit in baptism and mark him as Christ's own forever. Do you think that means that Andrew is protected from life, from any kind of pain or suffering or hardship or failing? No. It means we promise that wherever there is pain or hardship or suffering or injustice, God is with us in that place and we will be with him. The power of the Holy Spirit says that when we gather together in this one place in this one time, we are with the people of faith in all places at all time. The power of that, the power of the Holy Spirit to say we are connected to Fumi's family in Japan, we are with them today and they are with us. To say to Fumi's family in Japan through the suffering and the pain that they have been through in Japan we are with them in solidarity and we will do for and we will do with and we will stand by. That is the power of the Holy Spirit to say we together as the body of Christ are capable of doing more than we can ask or imagine.

But we're St. Luke's, and we're kind of quiet people. We don't really want a big, old wind to rush in here and turn things upside down and change things too much. But any kind of time that the body of Christ gathers, maybe around a vestry table, maybe around a dinner table, maybe around a holy table, maybe just like those disciples from the reading of the Gospel of John quietly in an upper room, then that power of Jesus to be present and give us peace and give us courage and help us find one voice to make hard decisions, that peace of God that passes all understanding is with us. And we are so privileged today share that peace with Andrew. We are so privileged that Andrew's family is sharing him with us. And when we make those vows in just a few moments that we promise to support Andrew in his life following Christ, we may or may not get to see Andrew very much as he grows up, but if we will be faithful as the body of Christ here at St. Luke's, then we will be faithful to the promises we make to Andrew today, the promises we make to each other.

You know what sounds even better than "The Lord be with you" is the "The Lord is with you." The Lord is with us. There is no greater truth, there is no greater comfort, there is no greater salvation. The Lord is with us. Alleluia.