

Day of Pentecost John 20:19-23

I think it's generally true that people are always looking to improve, to change their lives for the better. That's why there are so many adverts for diet and exercise products – lots of people out there trying to change their appearance for the better. Also now we see lots of adverts for laser eye treatment so that we can improve our vision and get rid of glasses. People are always looking to improve, to change for the better. Isn't that why people go to school? Isn't that why people continue to train in the workplace? People want to be changed for the better.

Think for a moment about what is it about yourself that you would like to change. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? Is it the way you look? Something to do with your health? Something to do with your level of expertise on a certain subject? If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be? I can't imagine that anyone here is unable to think of anything.

Well it's not just us who want change, God is interested in change too. He's interested in changing you and me. Today is Pentecost or Whit Sunday, and as we take a look at what happened on Pentecost many years ago, we see that God changed many people's lives. And as we learn about these things, we will see that God is also interested in changing us - there are certain things about us that God wants to change.

Major changes took place on that first Pentecost. We are all familiar with the story, we know that the disciples believed in Jesus as their Saviour, but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things. They still didn't fully understand Jesus' mission, why he had come to earth. They had just seen him ascend into heaven confirming their faith in his divinity but leaving them with so many unanswered questions about what should happen next. They were confused, and as a result, they were timid. They weren't confident about sharing the Gospel with others. How could they be, if they didn't fully understand it?

But then Pentecost came. The disciples were together, when the sound of a blowing wind came down from heaven. What seemed to be tongues of fire settled on their heads. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned before. A crowd gathered, people from all over the world, and that crowd listened as the disciples preached the Gospel. The Apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd – he gave a beautiful sermon that God the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach, a sermon that converted 3000 people in one day.

So you see the extent of the changes that took place on Pentecost. No longer were the disciples confused. Now they understood the plan of salvation completely. No longer were they timid. Now, they were confident, speaking publicly. Look at Peter – two months earlier he was so afraid that he denied Jesus three times. Now he was speaking to the crowd with confidence and understanding that he had never had before.

There was another change that took place on Pentecost, and you could argue that this change was more spectacular than what happened to the disciples. After Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost, 3000 people came to faith and were baptized. Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at eternal life – everything had changed. The Holy Spirit was the one who converted those 3000 people that day. Now these people knew that they were at peace with God. Now they

knew that Jesus was their Saviour.

Pentecost can be summed up in one word, and that word is change. We see the change that took place in the disciples, and the change that took place in those 3000 people. Our world today needs change. There are so many people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, who do not seem to believe in anything. There are nominal Christians who can't bring themselves to make any real commitment to Christ and his mission. And there are so many committed Christians who are like those disciples were before Pentecost – confused, timid and unable to share their faith. We need the Holy Spirit to come to us, and change us.

Our problem is, although we all have things we'd like to change about ourselves, at the same time we resist change. We don't think we as a whole person need to be changed, just perhaps little bits of us. "I'm alright the way I am," we say to ourselves. "What do I need to change about myself?" The answer is, a lot. Yes, it's true, we are Christians, but we still have sinful habits that we don't want to get rid of. We still have moments when we are selfish. We still have moments when we completely misunderstand what God is telling us. We still have moments when we fail to share our faith because we're too timid. It is true that we are Christians, but we still need to change. We still need to become more and more the people that God wants us to be.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came directly to Jesus' disciples. Today, the Holy Spirit comes to you through the quiet, humble preaching of the Word. It is through the personal promptings of the Spirit within our churches that Jesus' mission continues. On the surface, it doesn't look like anything spectacular. But on the inside of you, all kinds of changes are taking place. And when we combine the Word with water, we get baptism. What happens at a baptism? Once again, on the surface, it doesn't look like anything spectacular. But we know from what God tells us in his Word that in baptism, the Holy Spirit changes a person, causes a person, even a little person, to become a child of God and an inheritor of his kingdom.

And what happens when we combine God's Word with bread and wine, as Jesus did on the night he was betrayed? Once again, it doesn't look like anything spectacular, but it is. Because as we partake of Christ's body and blood in the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Spirit changes us. He strengthens our faith, he increases our love for Christ and our love for one another.

We need to ask ourselves if we are happy to keep tinkering with the physical bits of ourselves that we want to change or if we are ready to commit to changing our very being. Are we ready to make way for the Holy Spirit to do his life changing work in our lives? Because this is what the Holy Spirit does. He did that in a miraculous, unusual way on that first Pentecost. Today, he does it as you spend time hearing the Word, as you witness a baptism, as you receive communion – that's how the Holy Spirit changes people, changes us, turning us more and more into the Christian that God has made us to be.

If you could sum up Pentecost in one word, that one word would be change. May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you, to change you, to fan into flame the fire that is in each one of you. Amen.