



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



The Promise and the Spirit...

Text: John 20:19-23

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Often on Pentecost a day of reflection on the coming of the Holy Spirit, we use the famous passage from Acts with tongues of fire coming down, a dove, God's voice speaking, and the apostles speaking in a multitude of languages. It is all very, very dramatic.

John's Gospel, on the other hand, speaks of Jesus breathing on the apostles after the resurrection, and before sending them out in the world to preach and teach the Gospel in its entirety.

Often, I think of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and promise. The promises of God and the promises we make unto God. Today, the day of Confirmation for four young people, is a day of great promise and it is also a day of promises. The Confirmands made promises and the congregation made promises.

And all within the context of the promise that God gives us.

Pentecost, by its very nature is a 'start-up' kind of day. Most theologians refer to the Day of Pentecost as the birthday of the Christian Church and it truly is. The Holy Spirit comes into the midst of the church and challenges, inspires, and sustains us.

And continually reminds us of the Promise of God, and our promises to God.

Sometimes in thinking about the Holy Spirit and promises I debate within myself what exactly that means. If I were to say what it means, how does it relate to four people being confirmed and to the rest of us. I came to a conclusion.

The first thing I think is that with the Holy Spirit and Promise, the first thing that we are called to do is to make a difference. I can't stand all these speeches to people telling them to change the world---if you can and want to, great, but most of us are not going to change the world.

But we can all make a difference.

I came to this conclusion because I think that Christianity has been diminished into being

something of a “Get out of Hell Free Card.” I’m not opposed to Heaven and I have no aspirations for anyplace called Hell, but I cannot believe that there is not more than this. I cannot bring myself to believe that Jesus came and lived among us to simply drop off a Get out of Hell Free Card. It strikes me that there has to be more.

We are called to make a difference. We can make a difference in little things or in big things. If we were to go around the Sanctuary today and ask each person here to name a person or two who made a difference in their lives, we’d be amazed by the wide range of people who have made differences in their lives.

Making a difference requires hanging in there when things are difficult and it means hanging in there when things are difficult and you’re not accomplishing a whole lot. Failure is not always a bad thing.

When I was growing up I read an story about a man who was the most unsuccessful inventor of the light bulb. A lot of people tried to do it and they all failed. This one guy was the biggest failure of all. The thing that separated him from everyone else was that on one attempt he was successful. Many people will tell you that what made Thomas Edison great wasn’t his intelligence but his perseverance. He didn’t quit.

To make a difference we don’t have to be great inventors and we don’t have to solve all the problems of the world.

World hunger is a problem and we probably won’t be able to solve it. But we can feed some of the people.

Poverty is a world wide problem that we probably can’t solve. But we can help some people with it.

Jesus came, in part, for us to make a difference.

The flip side of this, however, is not only for each of us to make a difference, but for each of us to challenge one another to make a difference.

Let’s not let one another say that things are ‘okay’ and that God has no expectations for us other than to have faith, smile, and be happy.

As long as there are people who have need, there is an opportunity to make a difference.

The Holy Spirit comes in the midst of promise. We make promises in the midst of the Holy Spirit. We are challenged not only to make a difference, but to challenge each other to make a difference.