



The Sermon

Day of Pentecost / A

31 May 2020

"Saying 'Yes' to God"

Acts 2:1-21 or Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 104:25-35, 37;

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21; John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39

The disciples were afraid! Or perhaps "terrified" is the more appropriate term. Their world had come to an abrupt end on a Friday afternoon as their teacher, leader, and friend had died in shame on Calvary Hill, just outside the city walls of Jerusalem. On that dark afternoon, there was no good news as they scattered from the city in search of safety, security, and something that resembled sanity. The years of preaching and teaching, traveling and telling seemed for nothing. The miraculous healings, and even the raising of Lazarus from the dead, were now only distant memories. The blessings of the poor, the meek, the persecuted, the mournful felt like just a collection of empty words. The peaceful kingdom Jesus preached now lay in broken ruin, like his broken body on the cross. The disciples too were broken - heartbroken.

But some of their number, following the lead of Mary Magdalene and the other women, had gone to the tomb to see for themselves, while others among them couldn't muster the courage to even venture into the garden. The pain of loss was too new. The longing for the past, the good times, offered little comfort.

In the early hours of that first Easter morning, the women had brought strange news: "Jesus is alive!" they had said. But . . . but, surely that cannot be. After all, they had all seen the soldiers, witnessed the slow agonizing death march through

the jeering market crowds of the city, heard the hammering of the nails, and the pain-filled, wretched cries of their Lord as he was hoisted up on the cross.

The women's news couldn't possibly be true. . . . Could it? . . . The disciples were understandably confused. So, they had retreated and gathered together behind locked doors of that same Upper Room, to comfort each other, to reconnect with the familiar, to feel safe. Safety in numbers - behind closed doors. The world, the pain, the fear - all safely kept at bay on the other side of a lock.

But locks, no matter how strong or carefully crafted, cannot keep Resurrection out. Even behind closed doors, in this room flooded with so many memories, and now saturated with grief, the miracle of the Resurrection finds its way in.

"Peace be with you." Jesus says, suddenly standing in their midst. Flesh, and blood, and body. Restored. Made new. Resurrected. Their initial fear and bewilderment now turn to excitement - the locks forgotten because the one thought lost to them is now alive, with the scars, and marks of the nails to prove it. Look. Touch. It really is Jesus! He lives! And hope once again lives! Hope, and trust, and belief, and faith are resurrected!

No matter how carefully shut and barred, not even locked doors can keep the Risen Jesus, the Anointed One, out. "Receive the Holy Spirit." The voice is so familiar; it resounds once again with urgency, and with love. And in that moment, their lives are forever transformed. They can no longer hide behind doors, out of sight, frozen by fear, seeking to keep the world out. Jesus is alive! Out there, out in the world, hidden in the guise of those in need.

The disciples gather to find comfort in the familiar, but nothing will ever be the same. Jesus is risen! Jesus is ascended! After the walk to Emmaus, the Easter evening appearance, the breakfast on the Galilee shore, and other manifestations, Jesus' work is now done, and he ascends to be reunited with his heavenly Father, and be seated in glory.

And so, once more, in a house behind closed doors, the disciples again gather. "What now?" they wonder. In silence and sorrow, the disciples gather and pray. Then suddenly, a violent wind engulfs the house, filling every corner and crevice. Tongues of flame hover above their heads, and unstop their tongues.

And suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit of God, they are driven out - out into the world, out from the house, out from behind the closed and locked doors – driven out to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ to every nation, tribe, language, and people. Full of new wine? No, filled to overflowing with God's renewing Spirit. Just as Jesus had promised, he did not abandon them. No. The Holy Spirit, God's Advocate had come to them, just as Jesus had promised.

On this 2020 Feast of Pentecost, owing to the pandemic we find ourselves in the midst of, we too gather, like those first disciples, behind the closed doors of our own homes. But even shut away, we still come. We come with our hopes and our fears, with doubts and uncertainties, with pain and joy, looking to be transformed, to be resurrected, to be made new.

We offer a simple prayer. A prayer that the followers of Jesus throughout the centuries have whispered and sung, have shouted and proclaimed: "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" It is a plea, a prayer to be once more filled with the breath of God that called all of Creation into being, to be replenished, and nourished, and strengthened, that we may boldly enter into the wilderness of our doubts and uncertainties.

This year, on this great Feast Day of the Church, we may whisper quietly, we may shout triumphantly, we may pray silently, we may proclaim boldly – but the message is forever the same: "Come, Holy Spirit, come!"

But, I ask you: Do we really want the Holy Spirit to come among us? Jesus, after his baptism by John in the River Jordan, found himself driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. The wilderness, where unplanned and unprepared for things can happen, where we are forced to face ourselves laid bare. Do we really want to be filled with that same Spirit? The Holy Spirit makes things happen, compels us out into the world to find Jesus present in our sisters and brothers. The Holy Spirit of God opens our eyes, forcing us to more clearly see Jesus in those we would rather keep at arm's length, the ones we are more comfortable serving from a distance, from behind the security of locked doors, and the safety of a checkbook.

So, we must ask ourselves: Do I really want to be so filled with God's Most Holy Spirit?

Like the disciples, we, the Church, can sometimes crave the safety of locked doors, locked hearts, and locked minds. Behind locked doors, we can find comfort in the familiar, but if we truly seek to follow Jesus, we know that no locked doors will keep him from appearing in our midst and compelling us out in the world. "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these," are words of promise if we are truly open to the moving of the Spirit in our lives, in our Church, in our world. So, "Come, Holy Spirit, come! Come now!"

Our prayer on this day is a dangerous prayer because it means that we must be open and vulnerable, willing to be challenged and changed so that we can seek and find Jesus in the ones we serve. "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" means that we must become open to the transforming power of God in our lives. It means that we will find ourselves standing in solidarity with those on the margins, on the edges, on the outs.

Our simple prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit, come!" is the first step towards saying "yes" to God's desire in our life of faith. We are called, with the Spirit's help, to say "yes" to God! Called to make his will, our will!

The question for us is can we honestly say "yes" to God at work and school? Can we consistently say "yes" to God operating within our families and among our friends? Can we obediently say "yes" to stepping out from behind our closed doors and into the deep waters of loving our neighbors? Can we willingly say "yes" to allowing the locked doors of our hearts and minds to be opened again and again and again?

Edwina Gateley sums up our longing to fully say "yes" to God in her poem, titled: *Called to say yes*:

*We are called to say yes
So that rich and poor embrace
And become equal in their poverty
Through the silent tears that fall.*

*We are called to say yes
That the whisper of our God*

*Might be heard through our sirens
And the screams of our bombs.*

*We are called to say yes
To a God who still holds fast
To the vision of the Kingdom
For a trembling world of pain.*

*We are called to say yes
To this God who reaches out
And asks us to share
His crazy dream of love.*

When we say “yes” to God, God’s crazy dream of love, and mercy, and grace, and compassion, and forgiveness, and reconciliation becomes our crazy dream of love. We are called to say “yes” to allow the Spirit of the Living God to fall on us and unlock the doors that keep us from loving our neighbors. God’s crazy dream of love calls us to stand with and work for the homeless, the working poor, the outcast, the refugee, the persecuted, the put-down and the put-out. When we say “yes” to God, we say “yes” to our sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus in disguise. And having said “yes”, they can no longer simply be left as petitions in our well-worn prayers, but persons known to us, embraced by us, as deserving of our dignity, justice, respect and love.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Yes!

Come, Holy Spirit, come now! Yes!

This day: Come, Holy Spirit, come to make a home in me! Yes! Yes! Yes!

Amen.