

## ***DAY OF PENTECOST***

*Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-35, 37b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15*

How do you measure the success of a church? How can we know that the church is accomplishing something, and that it has a purpose for its existence? How can we tell if the church is doing anything useful or not?

Some churches would go by how many people attend worship service, or how many children attend Sunday School, and so on.

Is that a true benchmark for measuring a church's success?

It's natural for people to judge a church by the number of people that attend regular worship on Sundays. But, is the church that has 20 people, or less, at regular worship, with no musicians, considered a failure? We get too hung up on the idea that for something to be good, it has to be bigger and better than anything else.

We should rejoice with those who consistently have large numbers for regular worship, but the point is that a church where 2 or 3 are gathered on a Sunday, is no less a church. Actually, what happens on Sunday, is only a fraction of what the church is all about, and what it is doing, and the words of Jesus about greatness consisting of being a servant, get right to the core of the matter.

Again, what happens on Sundays is important, but what happens for the rest of the week, such as visiting the sick, the hurting, the shut-ins, the dying; and the care offered to those in hospital, are all part of what makes a church, a church. People using their

gifts to serve others in whatever way they can, and making a difference in people's lives, is the church doing God's work seven days a week here in this congregation and this community.

That is the point that is made on Sundays with the dismissal at the end of worship to go into the world to love and serve the Lord.

Today is the Day of Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church, and the point is that the church, and the work of the Holy Spirit, are very rarely about the spectacular and the amazing working of the Holy Spirit. People tend to limit the working of the Holy Spirit to special spiritual experiences like talking in tongues, or the performance of miracles. But by limiting the Holy Spirit to the amazing and spectacular, we can miss the prime importance of the normal, loving activity of the Spirit in our lives, and through our lives to others.

When Jesus Himself talked about the Holy Spirit there was no mention of the amazing, or the spectacular. The majority of the Spirit's work is done quietly. In John's Gospel, Jesus uses the word 'Paraclete', for the Holy Spirit, a Greek word that is translated as Counsellor, Comforter, Helper, Encourager, or Enabler. There is nothing spectacular about the title 'Paraclete'.

The Spirit is that Holy Friend who quietly works in us, and through us, every day, behind the scenes, in the normal activities of our lives, and the lives of the people around us.

Many people will say that they have never had an experience of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and yet in reality, the Holy Spirit has been very much alive in their lives, as they have steadily borne the beautiful fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. They don't realize that they have been touching lives around them with the greatest fruit of all: love.

It is very easy to take the work of the Holy Spirit for granted.

It's a lot like living in Newfoundland. We take the weather, the natural beauty of the land, the forest and the wild life, pretty much for granted. We travel up around the coastline, or up into the country, without even thinking about it. It's pretty much a routine, and we don't even see it as anything amazing or spectacular.

Yet, when tourist and visitors come from other places, and marvel at the view, or are amazed at the open spaces we have, or gasp at the natural beauty of our landscape, it tends to cause us to look at these things with fresh eyes, and marvel again at the great things around us that we overlook so often every day.

That's what happens with the Holy Spirit. Because he is the quiet helper in the background, the unassuming friend, the invisible guide and comforter, we take his presence for granted. The Holy Spirit, the Helper, is quietly at work in the sincere concern of a friend for our health; in the generosity of those who give us so much help; in the inner strength we discover in times of crisis; in those moments when we admit that we have been wrong; in making a tough choice; in the amazing strength of people who face one bad thing after another; and in those times when we have dared to love, even though it was hard to do so.

The Holy Spirit, the Helper is also quietly at work in empowering us to take on responsibilities that we once thought were impossible for us; in refusing to let the greed of society take over our soul; in giving thanks always, even though times have been hard; in rising above past failures and putting past hurts behind us; in finding a central core of peace in the midst of turmoil; in an adult patiently teaching a child self-esteem and self-control; in the person sitting quietly beside a hospital bed; in a parent praying for a troubled child.

Today, the Day of Pentecost, is just the beginning of the Holy Spirit's story. The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, is active amongst us in a quiet manner, inspiring the fruits of the Spirit amongst us. This is where the real work of the church is happening. Yes, there is a time and a place for the amazing and spectacular, but the real powerful work of the Spirit in a congregation, is when the people become like Christ to others, and serve them in whatever way they are able, with whatever gifts God has given them to do that work.

The Holy Spirit comes to us through the simple words of the Bible, through the simple water of baptism, and the simple bread and wine of the Eucharist, and calls us to renewal and change.

The Holy Spirit is always creating all things new and helping us to be what God made us to be, true servants to one another.

**AMEN.**