

# SERMON

## STARTERS

Matthew W. Charlton

### June 8, 2003 Pentecost

Acts 1:1-21; Ps. 104:24-34, 35b;  
Rom. 8:22-27; Jn. 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

#### The Indwelling of the Spirit

Pentecost celebrates the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. In the Christian year, this is the final celebration of the Easter season, bringing the church as the body of Christ in communion with God's Spirit. As such, a sermon for Pentecost seeks a deeper appreciation and understanding of the work of the Spirit in terms of the life of the Christian church. This Sunday, unlike any other, celebrates the fulfillment of Christ's promise: the presence and gifting of the Spirit as our Advocate.

Paul reminds us that we are called out of a life defined by sin to one defined by grace, a new way of living in communion with God. Pentecost is the sign of that grace. With its emphasis on the inclusiveness and hospitality of the church, Pentecost teaches us about living a new life in the Spirit. The Spirit comes to dwell within us, enabling us in our communal ministry. We discover this indwelling of the Spirit as the fulfillment of the promise of Christ and the assurance of our reconciliation with God. I'm reminded of the recent film "Life as a House" (New Line Cinema). The house is portrayed as an unspiritual place. Yet, when filled with those empowered to seek change in themselves, it becomes a place of reconciliation and healing. In a



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similar way, this is the reality of the Christian communion when filled with the Holy Spirit.

### June 15, 2003 Trinity Sunday

Isa. 6:1-8; Ps. 29;  
Rom. 8:12-17; Jn. 3:1-17

#### Celebrating the Trinity

Trinity Sunday is easily buried in the opening excitement of summer. Yet, this day begins the celebration of the life of faith by recognizing the Trinity as the ever-flowing spring of that faith.

The emotional charge of Romans 8 captures our attention. We live according to the Spirit, receiving a spirit of adoption. Crying out to Abba, we reveal that we are children of God, suffering and glorified with Christ. Preaching on the Trinity is a moment infused with a full range of real and concrete emotions that constitute who we are as faithful people of God. Trinity Sunday conveys a sense of excitement, the power of the dance, and the rhythm that is our faith.

Preaching on this text presents an interesting homiletical challenge: how to preach on the three persons of the one God while being theologically correct and rhetorically clear. Thus, we should consider ways in which the Trinity can be made concrete and real for us. The use and explanation of liturgical symbols representing the Trinity, paintings, and liturgical dance can help interpret this mystery while avoiding the trap of a lengthy theological treatise on the nature of the Godhead. Focus on what is important for faith: to know that God is with us, for us, and in us.

### June 22, 2003 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Sam. 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23), 32-49;  
Ps. 9:9-20; 2 Cor. 6:1-13; Mk. 4: 35-41

#### Life: Turbulent Waters

For us, when reading Mark's gospel, there is no doubt who Jesus is. The disciples, however, are not so sure about this man, even less sure when faced with a sinking boat! Here, we encounter a taciturn Jesus and several fearful, maybe even faithless, disciples. The disciples feel as though they will surely perish under the turbulent waters of the sea. What they fail to realize is that their life is not in their hands. It is the other, the one asleep in the stern, the Son of God, in whom they must place their trust.

In our time, living in the echoes of violence, finding space for faith in the midst of all that torments us can be a difficult task. Should we seek instead to live a life not out of fear but out of faith, we must be willing to "go across to the other side" with trust and faith in our guide. Simply put, this is the Christian life: we traverse the perils of life's seas day in and day out, hoping that we will not perish but quite sure that we will. However, faithful hearts always seek the peaceful One who is unconcerned with the beating of the waves. Jesus, the one who brings grace and peace, is the source of our faith. His teaching is for us not to fear, but to trust in grace. Fear resides restlessly in doubt. Faith rests peacefully in grace.

### June 29, 2003 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

2 Sam. 1:1, 17-27; Ps. 130;  
2 Cor. 8:7-15; Mk. 5: 21-43

#### Faith: "Do not fear, only believe."

The woman is bleeding. She has tried all the remedies, yet her sickness seems to

have no cure. A cry goes out that a child, a young girl, is dying. An illness that no one understands is taking yet another victim. Two nameless women, one sick, the other dying, frame this gospel story. Jesus says: "Do not fear, only believe." Placed between illness and death, this declaration leaps off the page, begging for our attention. Are these not the same words that Jesus had for the disciples on the boat? Does this not sound a good deal like Paul's exhortation in Romans 8 and the reaction to the Holy Spirit in Acts?

The juxtaposition of faith and fear is a recurring theme in our canon. This theme invites us to reflect on how we are faithful to God and loving toward others, especially those who are in need. The well-worn and hackneyed phrases "Let go and let God" and "What would Jesus do" show that we are constantly trying to express that faithfulness in meaningful ways. Perhaps we should seek ways for that belief to come to life in active love toward others, like the beneficent love Jesus expressed toward the woman and the child.

**July 6, 2003**  
**4th Sunday after Pentecost**

2 Sam. 5:1-5, 9-10; Ps. 48;  
 2 Cor. 12:2-10; Mk. 6: 1-13

**Discipleship: Don't Shake  
 the Dust off too Soon**

The movie "Hoosiers" is about a basketball coach, his team, and small town high school basketball spirit. At one point, the town-folk take a vote to dismiss the coach because he doesn't play ball like they are used to. The coach, however, does not back away from what he came to do: create a winning team. In the process, he salvages the life of the town drunk and ultimately wins the town folk's support. He could have left and gone on to another place, shaking the dust off his shoes at the town limit. Instead, he stays and perseveres.

Creating disciples of Jesus Christ takes a similar kind of perseverance. Many people are easily daunted by things that require them to make changes in their life, that require a different ordering of priori-

ties. Discipleship doesn't end when you walk out the church door. It is a complete life event, requiring your whole being. Jesus sent the twelve out, two by two, with barely the necessities of life, to bring a message of peace and hope to a troubled and hopeless world. The life of discipleship is compelling for this reason: we are always on the lookout for hope and we should not give up too quickly in searching for it or bringing it to others.

**July 13, 2003**  
**5th Sunday after Pentecost**

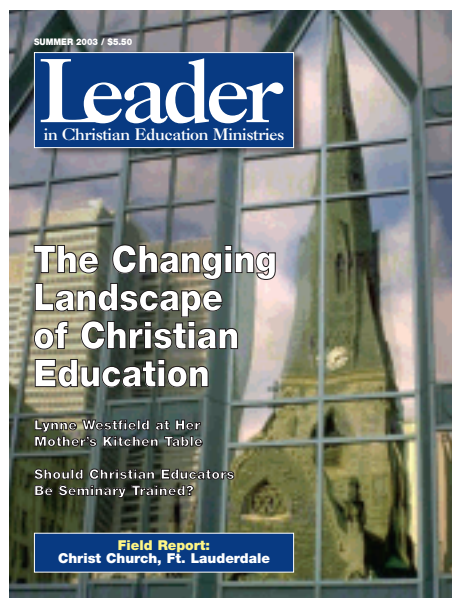
2 Sam. 6:1-5; 12b-19; Ps. 24;  
 Eph. 1:3-14; Mk. 6:14-29

**Dancing before God**

"For in self-giving," writes C.S. Lewis, "...we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being" (The Problem of Pain. (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 136). David and the Israelites went dancing before the ark of the Lord with all their might. Every fiber of their

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being was poured into the dancing, into the playing of instruments, into being present with God with praise. In David's exuberance, we can sense deep passion, a desire to honor God with all he is in his being to the point where Michal, looking at David dancing before the ark, despised him.

This passage invokes the desire to praise God with the gifts we have been given. Preaching from the perspective of affirming the gifts of the congregation for their ministry will add a capstone to the series of life, faith, and discipleship. Our discipleship is overflowing with gifts, gifts that are meant to be shared and passed on in the community of faith. We accomplish this through a deep-seated desire to love God and neighbor with all our being. There will be those who look on the desire to be faithful with scorn and contempt. But the life of the disciple, in seeking to praise God, lays scorn aside and seeks to dwell in the fellowship of Christ

**July 20, 2003**  
**6th Sunday after Pentecost**

2 Sam. 7:1-14a; Ps. 89:20-37;  
Eph. 2:11-22; Mk. 6:30-34, 53-56

### Draw Near in Peace

Paul has a clear view of situations filled with division: all difference is overcome in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Walls, real and symbolic, come tumbling down its shadow. We read this today and ponder the idealistic world of its conclusion. We wonder whether difference can ever be overcome and, if it can, what role faith plays in it. How can the Christian faith be a healing faith? Can a way be found through the barriers imposed by politics and religion that will allow the world to live in peace? The Apostle believes that the cross can make this a reality. But what about us? How real is the peace brought by the cross when even those who profess Christ as Savior fail to have peace with one another?

Recall the images of the Berlin Wall as it was being torn down, people tearing apart the concrete reality that separated them for decades. Walls like that are built to prevent interaction and communion. Sadly, faith is not immune to this tendency. I recall an attempted visit to an urban church and being overwhelmed by the tight security that controlled the entrance to a sanctuary of the Prince of Peace. Life

in Christ breaks down barriers and overcomes hostility toward the other. It does not build them up because the cross shattered all walls for all time. We must always be mindful that God draws near to us in the shadow of the cross.

**July 27, 2003**  
**7th Sunday after Pentecost**

2 Sam. 11:1-15; Ps. 14;  
 Eph. 3:14-21; Jn. 6: 1-21

**It Costs Too Much**

An old adage proclaims that if you have to ask how much something is, you can't afford it. Jesus confronts Philip with the question, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Yet, Philip wants to know something different: how much will it cost to buy enough bread every person. Doubtful that everybody will get enough, Philip bypasses the question of where bread can be purchased to conclude that buying enough bread would cost too much. So, he replies, "Six months' wages

would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Jesus, however, takes what little there is and makes abundance. Not only does everyone get enough, there are leftovers, showing that the benefits of helping others in their greatest need far outweigh the cost.

All appeals to miracles aside, the feeding of this crowd shows Jesus' concern for those who hunger. Cost is not a factor in the divine provision. For those who live in a cost-conscious economic world, cost is often considered first before life and the meeting of needs. Can we ever make sense of people having to choose between food and shelter because they can't afford both? Like Philip, Jesus asks us where we can get the bread to feed those who are hungry. Like Philip, we reply that the economic cost is too great, we can't afford it. Thankfully, Jesus doesn't believe us when we say things like that. □

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