

Pentecost 2008

by Jack Mannschreck

May 11 - June 15

May 11 - PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 7:37-39

The din of the crowd increases as students continue to file into the gymnasium. The band tunes and warms up their instruments. With a wave of the band director's baton, the fight song begins, the cheerleaders take center court, the team appears full of confidence, and the students stand in uproarious enthusiasm as the pep rally begins. As a youth, I loved pep rallies—a mainstay of many high schools across the nation.

And the purpose of these events? To build enthusiasm, support our team, and above all, to celebrate our school spirit. Spirit—that palpable feeling of pride that we were part of something bigger than ourselves. Our spirit grew as frenzied chanting and clapping and stomping shook the very rafters of the building. We were gathered together to build our enthusiasm and express our confidence in an ultimate victory!

The disciples “were all together in one place” as they waited for the promised gift of the Spirit. I imagine a growing excitement as the disciples spoke with each other, recounting the words of Jesus, “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Like a pep rally, there was a rush of excitement as the Spirit, like a rush of wind, filled the house. There were even some pyrotechnics as tongues of fire settled on the disciples.

Those who stood around asked, “What does this mean?” What this means is that each person is gifted so that “out of the believer’s

heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). It means that the spirit is creative (Psalm 104:30) and empowers God’s people through its gifts (I Corinthians 12:3b-13). It is the New Testament witness that the disciples did not stay together in one place—there was a victory to be won out there on fields across the world!

May 18 - TRINITY SUNDAY

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; II Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” Commonly called the Great Commission, these words of Jesus present some lofty goals: all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. These parting words of Jesus are intense. Jesus puts “all authority in heaven and earth” behind them and says he’s going to “be with them always,” watching over our shoulders as we do this kingdom work.

The scriptures give us evidence of the disciples’ far-flung ministries. In recent decades, new generations of Christians have written

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books on evangelism and church growth. We attend seminars and teach classes in outreach ministries. Churches build family centers and put coffee bars and bookstores in their lobbies (the spaces formerly known as narthexes!) Pastors work tirelessly to instill an evangelistic fervor into the membership of their churches. Worship is constantly transformed to hold people’s interest and meet their needs.

This Great Commission stuff is a lot of work! Yet, we must reconcile this demanding work with the value of Sabbath rest that emerges from the Genesis story of creation. With each day, God’s handiwork is enumerated and God deems creation as good. On the sixth day, humanity is created and given dominion over all other creatures on earth.

Humanity is the crown jewel of God’s creation, which is poetically emphasized in Psalm 8. With the creation of humanity on the sixth day, God “saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

God not only rested after six days of creation, God hallowed the seventh day. This Sabbath rest is so important that it’s one of the “big ten” – the fourth commandment. We are not to do any work. No one is to work on that day: not even slaves or beasts of burden (Deuteronomy 5: 12-15). Today, if we are to truly enjoy Sabbath, we must stop the frenetic pace of life—including life in the church—so that those who are charged with the Great Commission can connect with the Source of that commission. Jesus gives to us tremendous purpose in sharing our faith, and Sabbath rest empowers us for this purpose. It’s what we were created for – and it’s very good.

May 25

Isaiah 49:8-16a; Psalm 131;
I Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34

In the movie *I Am Legend*, Will Smith plays Robert Neville, a lone survivor in New York City. He is a military doctor seeking to cure those infected by a manufactured viral vaccine for cancer. Those infected have become dangerous monsters. Another survivor, Anna, finds Neville and proclaims their meeting as intended by God. Anna asserts, "The world is quieter now. We just have to listen. If we listen, we can hear God's plan." Initially, Neville protests, shouting, "There is no God!" Later, Neville begins to see the possibility that not only does God exist, but has a plan. He surrenders to that possibility saying, "I'm listening."

The Psalmist wrote, "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore" (Psalm 131:2-3). A calmed and quieted soul can hear more clearly the words of Jesus not to worry about life. Jesus knew the power of focusing on what should be central in our lives—the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. When our faith and actions are focused on God's kingdom, then all other things will fall into place. We shouldn't be distracted with what we shall eat or drink or wear. As God does for the birds of the air and the lilies of the valley, God will provide for our very basic needs. We are freed to seek God's kingdom.

Followers of Christ are empowered to focus on what God desires for our lives and ministry. Today's passage from I Corinthians provides wonderful imagery for discovering our purpose for ministry. The Lord will come and "bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." We need not worry about what others will think but strive to be faithful and trust-

worthy. Then we will receive a commendation from the only one that matters—God. In a multitasking, text messaging, fast food world in which we are so easily distracted, may we calm and quiet our souls enough to whisper, "I'm listening."

We who follow Christ find our purpose in knowing Christ's purpose, because we are also called to bear witness to the healing and wholeness Christ offers.

June 1

Genesis 6:11-22, 7:24, 8:14-19; Psalm 46;
Romans 1:16-17, 3:22b-28, (29-31);
Matthew 7:21-29

In many of life's endeavors, it's not only what you know but who you know that matters; a boss, a friend, or even an acquaintance can provide an opportunity or open a door to get you where you want to go in life. That is certainly true of our Christian faith. Knowing Jesus is central to our faith. The "righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17).

The problem is that Jesus tells us it is not enough to know Him. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Those who hear the words of Jesus and act upon them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock, providing a solid foundation for daily living. When the rain falls and floodwaters rise and the wind threatens to cave in your world, those who not only know Jesus but act on his words will not falter.

The lessons for this week illustrate the

building blocks of our firm foundation in Christ—knowledge, faith, trust, and most importantly, action. Knowledge of Jesus and his teaching provide insight into our relationships and the world in which we live. Faith and trust provide the lens through which we view the world. It not enough to know Jesus' words, have faith in God's love, and trust in God's promises—we must act upon them!

It's been said that knowledge is not power, but rather the use of knowledge is power. Likewise, we know that we are justified by faith apart from our works, but action is the fruit of our discipleship. Noah knew God and trusted him; he began to build the ark when there wasn't a cloud in the sky! Knowledge, faith and trust were important to Noah, but it was his actions that saved his life. Knowledge, faith, trust, and action provide for a life that is righteous and a relationship with Christ that is rock solid.

June 8

Genesis 12:1-9; Psalm 33:1-12; Romans
4:13-25; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

If you meander through the self-help section of any bookstore, you will no doubt see books on purpose: your purpose, God's purpose for your life, your purpose in your job, church, and community. We find life more meaningful when we know our purpose, and we are inspired by others who have a clear sense of purpose in life, and act on it to accomplish great things.

In today's Old Testament reading, we see Abraham called to live out a daring purpose by leaving his homeland and going to live in a hostile country. Thousands of years later, Paul lifts up Abraham as an example of one faithfully following God's purpose for his life.

In today's passage from Matthew, we see Jesus make his purpose very clear: he did not come to earth to fit in with the faithful, but

rather to sit with the sick. Immediately after Jesus announces his purpose of healing the sick and offering wholeness to the sinner, a leader from the synagogue approaches Jesus and needs him to go a step further—not just healing his sick daughter, but, in fact, raising her from the dead. As Jesus arrives at the synagogue leader's home, he finds the hired mourners have already gathered. Jesus tells them to go home because the girl is not dead but sleeping. Jesus, ridiculed by the mourners, does not deviate from his purpose of bringing healing and wholeness to the girl. The crowd is put outside, Jesus touches the girl's hand, and she gets up.

This is a wonderful story from Jesus' earthly ministry; however, it is meant to be our story also. Many Bible studies ask "with whom in the story do you most identify?" The synagogue leader? The woman? The girl? Jesus? I am almost always surprised at how few identify with Jesus, even though we are called to do just that! We who follow Christ find our purpose in knowing Christ's purpose, because we are also called to bear witness to the healing and wholeness Christ offers. We are called to be the body of Christ for the sake of the world. From the very beginning of our covenantal relationship with God we have been blessed to be a blessing for others. Jesus knew his purpose! Do we know ours?

June 15

Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7); Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

When Jesus "saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). These words resonate today with people who work long hours, pulled every which way by demanding bosses, trying to make ends meet, all while endeavoring to build strong families and lasting relationships with

their spouses and children.

This is Father's Day, and for some churches it is the last Sunday of Easter-inspired "regular attendance" before warm Sunday mornings and vacations vie for people's attention and energy. We want to celebrate God's love and care with those "harassed and helpless" folk in the pew. At the same time, the lessons for this Sunday emphasize service in response to God's love and care. Many people feel a disconnect when they come to the church looking for care, love, and a respite from the world's hectic pace, and instead feel pressured to get involved in some form of ministry.

God's care and love is not mutually exclusive to being in ministry, of course. Still, we need to be sensitive to the needs of those who seek community and care in our churches, and resist the temptation to overwhelm them with calls to ministry, announcing "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

I grew up on a farm in southern Michigan and the words, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" ring true for my years on the family farm. Harvest time or not, there was always work to be done. There were many sixteen-hour days on the farm and at the end of the day; the work would still be left unfinished. At the end of such days, my father would almost always say, "That's enough for today." This proper balance rest and work—even when that work is in their service of God—is important to understand.

People come to church for community and care, yet growth in their Christian faith is a result of a deeper understanding of service and a call to ministry. While it is necessary to equip and train people for meaningful ministry, we must also teach them the necessity of Sabbath rest and nurturing their relationships with God and others. The longer days of summer provide a great time for that message!

We must remember that Jesus' sending of the disciples to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" begins

with his compassion for the harassed and helpless. Yes, the harvest is plentiful and must be harvested, but the well-equipped laborer knows the necessity of rest and relationship.

Please Note: Sermon Starters is now an exclusively online feature. Sermon Starters for June 22 through July 27 will be posted to www.circuitrider.com by June 11.



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