**Pentecost, May 19, 2013, Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104; John 14: 8-17**

This past week, I received a letter from a friend. Her husband died this past winter, and she wrote thanking me for a sympathy note I had sent. Her note did not mention God's role in her husband's life or in her time of grieving. Oh, the family is Christian and the funeral was in a church. My friend is not unique in this, for even people who spend much time at church do not mention God much when they are asked about themselves. If she were asked to tell about herself, she would talk about her many identities: teacher, mother, sister, grandmother, aunt, sports fan, hiker, reader, and traveler. These are how she sees herself, and they are all wonderful. We each see ourselves with various identity labels. Because of what happened on this day my friend, each of us here, and all believers have one identity that surpasses all the others. That identity is that we are Spirit filled.

Today, Pentecost, is not just another ordinary day. On Pentecost we were formed into something new, something greater with this primary identity of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, as we read in the Book of Acts this morning, is the day when "..***suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of ...wind, and it filled the entire house...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit."*** It was 9:00 AM, and the people gathered were so full of joy that onlookers thought they were drunk or something -- but no, this was not an emotional event or an event caused by alcohol or some other controlled substance -- it was the real presence of God that happened here: they were filled with the actual Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is (as Jesus said in today's Gospel), "***the Advocate, to be with you forever...in you."***

In Old Testament times on the earth, before Jesus, the Holy Spirit only spoke to a few select people called prophets (like Jeremiah and Isaiah), but after Pentecost the Holy Spirit was and is poured out upon all believers. This happens for us at our baptism, and today we are reminded of this gift.

The problem is that most of us, like my cousin, don't claim this identity! The first thing we should be saying when someone asks us the question, "**Tell me about yourself"** is: **"I am a follower of Christ filled with the Spirit**," and they should know this too by how we live. All of who we are and have and do stems from the Holy Spirit. Our Psalm for today captures our dependence upon the Spirit: "***O Lord how manifold are your works....you open your hand and they are filled with good things....You send forth your Spirit...and...renew the face of the earth.***"

Why are so many people are wearing red this morning, and why this church has red doors welcoming people! Red is the color of the Holy Spirit, it is also the color that reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made for us so that we might be saved. The red doors invite people to come into a space filled with the Holy Spirit, a space set aside for encountering the living God, a place of safety and rest and healing and reconciliation.

Some people shy away from talk about or learning about the Holy Spirit because of the unknown, because of fear, because of a lack of ability to control the Spirit. The Good News today is that the Spirit is not to be feared, and will only ever cause you joy. The Spirit is beyond our five senses, can't be touched or grabbed, so has to be spiritually perceived. In order to be filled with the Holy Spirit we just have to ask for it -- we get the Holy Spirit by being open and receptive. The Spirit is constantly available to us. What’s it like to be filled with the Holy Spirit? It is to have: anxiety replaced by joy, resentment replaced by love, bitterness replaced by peace, doubt replaced by faith, fear replaced by boldness. The Spirit is responsible for God-incidences too. Jesus said, "***you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."*** Holy Spirit power gives us guidance and courage to do what we need to do, but can't do on our own. Holy Spirit power enables us to tell others about God's love, the most important thing they will ever hear. Jesus said in today's Gospel, "***This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world...neither sees nor knows."*** We found out about God's love from others who were filled with the Spirit, and we are to tell and show others. This sharing started back on that first Pentecost, and it continues through us today. That is God's plan! That is why Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church -- because with the coming of the Spirit came the sharing of the Good News of Jesus.

A while back I was getting ready to leave a social gathering when I met a woman I had never met. She started sharing a bit with me about how difficult her life had been lately. I did not want to hear her story, as I was focused on where I was supposed to be next. I really needed to leave, but I quickly prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit -- and got the distinct sense that I was to stay and listen. So I did, and oh my -- I heard her story, and then shared with her about what my relationship with Jesus has meant in my life. She asked me questions, and to make a long story short -- I got to know her, I invited her to church, she became a believer, claimed the love Jesus had for her, and her life gradually turned around. This happened because of the Holy Spirit. We are like sponges meant to be filled -- when the sponge is out of water it is dried up and not useful, but if it is plunged into water and the water is absorbed in all of its pores, then it can do what it was made to do. You and I were made to be filled with the Spirit.

One Sunday morning, when I served in another church, I had a sense that I was supposed to go over to the nearby hospital. Oh, I had an important role in the service that morning, but I just knew that I needed to go to the hospital; I did not know why, but I went. There in the emergency room, was the whole family of a parishioner, who had just had a crisis and was dying. They were gathered around his bedside and they were desperate for a clergy person to be there with them - but it was Sunday morning! And, poof -- I showed up, and was able to do the last rites. This was not a random coincidence; this was the work of the Holy Spirit.

 Some think that the greatest source of unused power in the world is Niagara Falls. This is untrue, for the greatest unused power in the world is the Holy Spirit.

This morning, claim your primary identity as a follower of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit. And from here on out, consult - listen to- follow the leadings of the Spirit in your life.

**Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love.** Amen.