**7 Easter, June 1, Acts 1: 6-14; Ps 68; 1 Peter 1:12-6-11; John 17: 1-11; Rev Mary Trainor**

Jesus said in Acts 1:8 we just read, “***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth***.”

Jim and I just returned from vacation in Canada – it seemed like we were at the end of the earth! It was a remote vacation area near a small town, with people around us who had traveled there from around the world to enjoy the beauty of the tall red cedar forest and the water. We had not been to this area in many years, and it turns out that over these years the small town has become a mecca for young adults who surf….it was a party town! There were oldsters like us around too, but for young people this was THE place to be- and they were having a good time – wild and crazy. There was a clear difference between our vacation goals (of tranquil retreat, hiking, reading) and theirs. Fortunately, we stayed in a little cabin outside of town and we were able to figure out a way to have our preferred vacation time….which, of course, included church.

Last Sunday, we attended the service at a little Anglican Church right in the downtown of this little town. Unlike the craziness around it the day before, on Sunday morning it was very quiet. I guess all the young people were still sleeping. We arrived ten minutes early through a closed door on church property that showed no signs of life. Once inside, we were greeted by a friendly older woman who handed us a bulletin and the priest said hi. The very small group of other older folks there obviously knew each other and had their routine down. We sat in a pew and waited. The service began, and we sang the opening hymn. Then something happened that changed everything for me: four young adults, very casually dressed in vacation attire, separately came into the service a few minutes late, and took seats in various places in the church. They were clearly visitors, and yet familiar with the liturgy: they fully and enthusiastically participated in the singing and prayers. They brought a freshness into the church which previously had felt stale, lifeless. I tried to figure out what it was that caused the switch in me – and then I realized it. I sensed in these young folks the living out of verse Acts 1:8 – ***they were living out of the power of the Holy Spirit as witnesses to Christ… to the ends of the earth***.” What does this mean? It means that they rely on God to give them the words, courage, guts to bring Christ's love, morality, forgiveness into their interactions. It means that they are able to witness: they tell people about their relationship with God, as they have an opportunity. This is not easy!

Here they were on vacation surrounded by party animals, and probably tempted to be party animals themselves. The world is full of temptations that pull us away from being witnesses of Christ. Peter put it this way in today’s Epistle, ***“Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.***” The devil is our sinful nature; the Greek word for devil is “*diablos*” which means divide. The work of the devil has to do with us separating ourselves from each other through all kinds of ways: arrogance, hate, anger, bad behavior, and so on. Yet, we are given the power to defeat this: Holy Spirit power. So that is what these young people were doing last Sunday morning while on vacation among the party animals -- they were there to gain strength to resist the devil, by worshiping among their brothers and sisters who understand how difficult it is to live a Christian life. We come to church to get strong for our work in the world, not to separate ourselves from people out there. Here we become equipped to do the work we’ve been given to do.

Jesus knows how difficult this is. And, in our Gospel today He prayed for us in this way, “***protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one***.”

This past week Maya Angelou died at age 86. She was a Christian, a poet, a writer, a person who had experienced horrible abuse as a child, an encourager of others. When she was asked a while back what she would like to read in her own obituary, she said, “..**That I dared to love. By love I mean the condition in the human spirit so profound it encourages us to develop courage and build bridges, and then to trust those bridges and cross the bridges in attempts to reach other human beings**.” This is what it means to live as a witness of Christ: to be a bridge builder in this world full of dividers; to see the good in each person, to share God’s love no matter where we are. And, to do this fueled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we especially give thanks for the three persons in our One God, each available to us, and each showing us the depth and breadth of God’s love for us: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The world does not define us, but rather our relationship with God defines us and our purpose. In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus praying to the Father on our behalf – He knows how difficult our lives can be. He says to the Father, “***they are yours***,” meaning that our existence is not random; we are born and made for God’s purpose.

It’s now summer. We are out there on the lakes, camping, barbecuing, gardening, swatting mosquitoes, fishing. We are seeing people out there a whole lot more than during our long winter: we encounter new people, visitors, tourists, family members, friends, neighbors more daily. Folks, we are part of something really exciting, life changing, life defining. We live propelled by the Spirit of God, and it is the church that helps us live it out. The church is not a building, but an open community of people who follow Christ. Our mission here at St John’s is to inspire, instruct, invite, and involve others in Christ’s work in the world. And the risen Christ is praying for us as we go, The Holy Spirit fills us, and we are the Father’s.

We are charged with Acts 1:8, excited with the vital nature of our purpose – in all the places we find ourselves. Will you rise to this challenge? Inviting people to come to our outdoor mass and picnic next Sunday morning is a good way of beginning that process. If each of us does one thing every day to invite, inspire, involve, instruct others in the Lord in the next week think of the impact that will have! You can make a difference; the Holy Spirit will see to that! Amen