

“... he breathed on them...”

The Gospel writers have their unique, individual ways to tell us about the mysterious events we know as the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the giving of the Spirit, Pentecost. The Church calendar follows St. Luke's chronology. Seven weeks, after the first Easter Day, the disciples are gathered in Jerusalem. They are joined by thousands of Pilgrims, who have come from all over the world to celebrate the ancient Jewish Feast of Pentecost (on the 50th day after the Passover).

There is an amazing experience of wind; they seem to speak many languages yet understand all; Luke tells us about visions of “fire” dancing on the heads of those gathered. According to Luke's account, the Risen Christ, before his last appearance, before his Ascension, tells the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they are filled with this new power, the Holy Spirit, and, thus, they will be able to continue Jesus' work.

For St. John, the Risen Christ on the very first Easter Day appears to the 10 disciples in the evening and fills them with the power of the Holy Spirit. He breathes on them and says “Receive the Holy Spirit...” John sees this new power as a new creation. He reminds us of the very start of the biblical story, “... the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters...” before God started the creation with light (Genesis 1:2). John starts his gospel with the same words that start the Bible, “In the beginning...”

So both Luke and John give us this story of how the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit and found the power to continue Jesus' work in the world. We know we are called to the same work, as the disciples, as the Church is every age and in every place. As we hear in Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples, to baptize, to teach.

We carry on this work of Jesus as we see the Holy Spirit working through us in three ways. We call the Holy Spirit, “The giver of life”. Our work is to bestow life, to inspire, to activate, to work in helping people know God gives life. Baptism is the sacrament of new life. We've had many baptisms during the Easter season, and we have two today. New life comes through our celebrations of marriage, transitions in life, graduations, and even when this physical life ends. Then we celebrate new life in the spiritual eternity we know as heaven. This is the new life Jesus offered.

The Holy Spirit is also known as “The Holy Comforter.” The Spirit strengthens, assists, advocates especially at times of challenge, stress, conflict, evil and death. This healing work of the Spirit is seen in the healing work of the Church. Not a week goes by at Grace Church without a sign of the Spirit's healing power.

Finally, the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (see John 16:13). The work of the Church is to bring truth to the world – the truth about God, the truth about love, the truth about sin. The Church always opens up new truths to a world sometimes living in denial or living in falsehood. This truth is like a strong breeze blowing through the world, breathing new understanding, new life, healing. The entire world was moved by our Presiding Bishop's sermon at the Royal Wedding. Bishop Curry spoke the truth; he spoke about the power of love: love like a fire that brings power and energy. I find Pope Francis to also be a speaker of truth. We are blessed to have these two great leaders in our day.

So this is what we celebrate on the Sunday we call the “birthday of the Church.” We have the power of the Spirit to carry on Jesus’ work in the world – in this place, at this time:

To bring new life

To comfort and heal

To lead others to the Truth.