

Let's begin today with a quick look at where we are in the ecclesiastical year. This past Thursday was Ascension Day, forty days after the Resurrection of Christ. You will recall in Acts 1:3 that Christ spent 40 days with the Apostles, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Christ also instructed His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the coming gift of the Spirit.

Our church calendar, developed over the 2000+ year history of the church, annually brings us current followers of Christ through these same events. We step back into the shoes of that first generation and re-live the life of Jesus. This is part of the lifelong spiritual formation which we are privileged to inherit as catholic Christians. Today, we have just celebrated the Ascension and are waiting, anticipating the gift that is to come.

Of course, next Sunday is the 50th day after the Resurrection, Pentecost, and so a week from today we will celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. The color for that day is red in remembrance of the cloven tongues like fire that rested upon each one of those believers. It is a fun tradition that members of the congregation wear red on Pentecost, and you are encouraged to do so as well. Another fun tradition is that we read the narrative of the coming of the Holy Spirit in multiple languages so please let me know if you know a different language and would be willing to read a verse or sentence.

Finally, the common name for Pentecost next week is Whitsunday which is a contraction of the phrase "White-sunday". This is confusing for the color of the day is red, not white. Pentecost, however, is one of the more traditional days for baptisms, so the name of the day comes from the white baptismal robes that were worn by those who were to be baptized. One final calendar note here: the week following Pentecost is Trinity Sunday, which officially begins the Trinity Season – also referred to as "ordinary time". I might suggest that this name simply means that the pace of Christological events that we celebrate is much slower, not that

this season of spiritual growth is dull for us who are pursuing a deeper life in Christ. At least for us we expect that isn't the case.

So that takes care of our calendar book-keeping. As I mentioned before, today we find ourselves in a brief in-between time. Christ has ascended into heaven, we have extinguished the Pascal candle, and we are waiting. Of course, He promised to not leave His fledgling Church without the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, His continuing presence which would remain with and live within the disciples. Today we have the advantage of hind sight to know that the wait is only 10 days, but those first disciples likely did not know that. They weren't quite sure what exactly would happen or when.

We can look back at their experience and imagine what they might have been feeling. I'm sure they had many questions. What were they going to do after the Holy Ghost was come? They believed in Jesus, but what did that mean for their lives? As the initial community of Christ followers, what were they to do? Well, ... they did the only thing they could ... wait. They likely were all a little anxious. Would Jesus really do what He said and send the Comforter? Did He really say what we think He said? Did we hear Him correctly? It is easy for us to imagine a little bit of panick setting in. What they really need is some confident leadership. Someone to reassure the disciples and to tell them that yes they did hear Jesus correctly, and we are just going to follow the instructions that He gave us all. We are just going to do what we all know we need to do. We are going to wait.

Part of what is happening here has to do with the issue of succession – that is, of passing leadership from one with authority to another who can take up the mantle and lead the people of God. No doubt that first group of believers felt somewhat lost. The incarnate presence of Christ had been taken from the believers. But Christ does not leave His newly constituted Church without leadership. He has been instructing the apostles during the past

40 days, and we read as much in the first two verses of the Acts of the Apostles. “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after (that) he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” We see here, that the transfer of leadership, particularly within the Body of the people of God, is not only about instructing them, but also about giving the Spirit, the gifting from God, to lead His people.

Today for our first lesson, we read Dueteronomy 34 where Moses, the friend of God, climbs Mt. Nebo, looks over into the land which was given to Israel as an inheritance. But Moses is at the end of his life. The leadership must be passed on to another to bring the people into the land.

A brief aside here some of you might be saying, “Father Kent, where did you get this Dueteronomy reading from? It isn’t in our lectionary where we normally find the readings from the first lesson.” This is a fair question, and a good Anglican trivia question too. The 1928 prayer book, which we use, had both an original lectionary and then a revised lectionary that was published in 1945. All of our modern BCP’s have the 1945 lectionary. The passage from Dueteronomy that we read this morning is from the original 1928 lectionary.

The verse we should focus on from that reading is verse 9 which reads, “Now Joshua (the son of Nun) was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.” What is fascinating here is that Joshua – again this is not from the New Testament church, but from the Old Testament people of God - was ordained in much the same way as priests and deacons are ordained even today. And in fact, in confirmation, each of you receive an ordination to lay ministry.

And we see explicitly mentioned that Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom (we can read this as a proto-gifting by the Holy Spirit) because of this ordination. He was given the Spirit

to lead the people of Israel into the promised land. He was given what He needed in order to fulfill his calling. The leadership of God's people did not end. It wasn't passed on by democratic vote. God prepared Joshua, and Moses passed on the gift He had been given at the burning bush to Joshua.

Another interesting reading from the earlier lectionary is from 2 Kings chapter 2 which is the story of Elijah's ascent into heaven. A large part of that narrative is the passing on of the spirit of Elijah to his servant, Elisha. In this case, you will recall that there isn't a laying on of hands, but Elisha had to be present when Elijah was taken up. So Elisha follows Elijah closely all day, even when Elijah tells him to stay where he is and to not follow. But Elisha stubbornly remains close at Elijah's side. Elisha's perseverance is rewarded. He finally does see the ascension of Elijah and then takes up Elijah's mantle, his office, as the prophet of God.

Here again we see the passing on of authority to the next generation of leadership. That authority is not just in title. In both of these cases, for Joshua and for Elisha, the spirit of leadership, the gifting for office by the Spirit of God is received. You will notice also that this requires a physical presence, and sometimes a physical touch. Moses laid his hands on Joshua. Elijah told Elisha, if you see me when I am taken from you, then the request that a double portion of my spirit would rest upon you, will come to pass. Elisha had to be present to see Elijah being taken into heaven. In fact in all of these cases – the first regarding the gifting of the Apostles, and the second and third the gifting of Joshua and Elisha – not only is there a physical presence, but there is a pre-existing relationship. Jesus knows the Apostles; He chose them. Joshua was Moses' servant throughout the 40 year wilderness wanderings (notice the prominence of the number 40). Elisha was Elijah's servant as well. Leadership and the gifting for leadership, is not wisely passed on when no relationship exists.

A couple of points here, that I hope you can take with you this morning. First, God does not leave it to us to appoint our own leaders through our own earthly understanding. He has

providentially given us leaders who are guided by the Spirit of God for the well-being and growth of the People of God in the Church. We can be, even should be, healthily skeptical of leadership, but without just cause to doubt our leaders, we should trust and support those whom God has put in authority over us. For me, I am excessively grateful for our bishops, and I am equally grateful that I know them well. They are godly men. They are wise men. And, even though I would be first to admit that they are fallible, I trust them, and confidently state that you can too.

And despite the risk of sounding self-aggrandizing or suggesting that it isn't the case, I would encourage you to trust me as well. Of course you obviously do to some extent already for I am your priest. But beyond that, I trust God that He has gifted me in my ordination to lead this parish. Even when I feel like I lack the knowledge and skill that some of my brother priests have, I know that Christ the King Anglican Church is in the hands of God, and that He is leading, directing, and guiding us, and He has gifted me for this ministry, in this time, and in this place, in ways that I do not comprehend.

Finally, let me refer to verse 10 of our epistle lesson from 1 Peter 4. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." As members of the Body of Christ, we are reminded here that all of us are gifted by the presence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. We, each of us, has a ministry. Few of us are called to ordained ministry, but all of us have skills and talents and passions that can be employed in the service of the King to grow the Kingdom. As this morning, I have asked you to trust me, may I also encourage you to trust yourselves. Be good stewards of the manifold grace of God, the giftings that He has given you. In me, and in all of you, as well as in our brother and sister believers in this community, Christ gives us all that we need. Let us use wisely what we have received.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.