Sermon on Pentecost Sunday 2017
(Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:3b-12; Jn 7:37-39)

Today the 50 days of Easter ends, fittingly, with another a principle feast of the Church, the Feast of Pentecost.

Many of us are aware that this is in some way connected to the gift of the Holy Spirit but we rightly wonder why and how it matters in our world and in our lives.

What our Gospel readings of the last few weeks of Easter have been leading us toward is the deepest mystery of our faith: that somehow Jesus’ death and then his astounding Resurrection are connected with this gift and that Jesus can’t remain terrestrial human for that gift to be activated; this connection is so strong that the gift Jesus promises is known as “another Jesus” to paraphrase Jesus’ promise of “another helper like me.”

Jesus’ promise is connected to a revelation of the Holy Spirit’s personal relationship-with-God dimension. But we need to pull back for a moment; though Jesus is promising an astounding new reality, we also recognize that the Spirit is not new!

The Spirit is, in the original Creation accounts, the brooder, the incubator of all; the hidden wisdom of God, the Spirit is the life-force in and around all things.

Both Hebrew and Greek have words, Ruach in Hebrew, Pneuma in Greek that refer to wind, breath, life-force/spirit.

Both male and female articles identify this force. In some respects the Spirit and Life and are, if not synonyms, very similar in ultimate meaning.

When I talk to my scientist son we both end up marveling at Life; how it works and why it is; and each time we run up against a Mystery: what is it that impels it; causes it to evolve in the way that it does?

From this “impersonal” side; all living creatures, all cultures, all the major religions know of and, indeed, know the Spirit.

Whether you’re conversing with the server at your favourite watering hole or noticing the ants marching in determined fashion towards that cookie crumb on your kitchen floor, you are involved with, aware of Life aka the Spirit

Not that it’s the same thing; the Spirit manifests Life, it resides in and around and through all life without taking away from the “beingness” of you, that server or that ant!

So, what I’m trying to say is that there are levels or layers to the Spirit and Jesus’ promise is connected to what already is but now to be “given all over again” in order to usher humanity into something new!

Even this “new thing” is not entirely new but is present in the original creation accounts of humanity; put simply our purpose is not simply to participate in life, however awesome and amazing life is!

We are not simply to be alive, but to be that which fosters life, those who become, through partnership with God and in the words of our gospel, life-giving streams of water welling up to eternal life.

We are like any other living thing; like any other living thing we have evolved over eons of time to be a certain way, to have certain instincts and characteristics: bipedal mammals with opposable thumbs, with a large prefrontal cortex which allows us to use language etc. etc.

And like every other manifestation of life, we are limited. We are, on one level, as weak, as vulnerable as all life and nothing, not even becoming a follower of Jesus changes that.

When someone says to me, “you’re just another balding fifty-something white guy,” I say “I accept your prejudice; what can I say; that’s what I am.”

When someone says about my role as priest and about St. Matthew, Abbotsford: “you’re the priest at that small Anglican Church that started after the Church split over the issue of same-sex blessings” I say “yup that’s me and that’s us!”

But that’s not all you are or I am! Our purpose is to be as small as we are, as finite as we are even as we are connected to the Infinite, even as we find ourselves not only drinking of the life-force or the Spirit but becoming a fountain of that Spirit ourselves.

I agree with Peter’s sermon in our first reading: all of us, young and old, men and women are meant to connect to the infinite: call it dreams and visions (dreams in particular are a potent path to the infinite); call it prophesy, which is the ability to tell God’s truth in a way that is relatable to those around us.

Like an all-powerful genie in bottle; humans have been crafted by God as small clay pots but with a capacity for an infinite elixir!

Pentecost is so special because it stretches this identity even further. What we see with the events we read about in Acts 2 is a great Mystery because it’s rooted in a paradox.

When we’re existing in what our society thinks of as the most “personal,” mode of being, that is, as individuals, we participate in the Spirit as the “impersonal Life-force,” as do all living things;

but when, according to our society’s way of thinking, we are existing in a less personal mode, that of a community; when, to use words from Acts 2 “we are all gathered together in one place” then the Spirit is revealed as personal and inspires not just aliveness, but communication that bridges all barriers!

The Spirit comes into full personhood, and thus *we* come into full personhood, not when we are by ourselves, but when the Spirit of Jesus becomes the One brooding over and incubating a new community out of all our smaller selves, out of our merely humanly created communities, communities that are often created by opposing one reality against the other.

Put a different way, what begins in Acts 2 is that Christ becomes the power of human community by giving us his Personal Spirit. This Personal Spirit, who is the Holy Spirit *becomes* personal as the Church reflects the Christ.

I say *becomes* because it’s only in 381 at the Council of Constantinople and the crafting of the final edition of the Nicene Creed that we have the full recognition that the Holy Spirit is not just a life-force, but a Person, co-equal with the Father and the Son.

The Father and Son’s amazing condescension is just this: only as the church grows in love and understanding and service does God’s presence with us become personal for us and for the world!

This is why in the Nicene Creed the third part says “I believe in the Holy Spirit” and then right away, “ I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.” You don’t know the One, be filled with the One, without living in and from the Other.

I don’t mean that everyone has to be a formal member of a congregation in order to be filled with the Spirit just that the revelation of the Spirit’s personhood is connected to the lived reality of Church e.g. the crafting of Creed.

The Holy Spirit is that which allows not just individuals but a new humanity, made up of every tribe, race, language, gender and orientation to be “The Body of Christ,” the love and forgiveness of God for each other and the world.

It is the Holy Spirit’s glory to take our necessary limitation, our smallness, our aloneness, even our antagonistic divisions and weave together from those limitations and infinite field of possibility; that infinite field of possibility is not an idea; it’s a community!

Pentecost is the Feast of the Holy Spirit because it’s the Feast of the Birth of the Church; it’s the birth of the Church because the impersonal life-force becomes the Person of the Spirit connecting with finite persons so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts; that’s what Paul is trying to say in our second reading.

It’s why it’s so cool that we’re having a congregational meeting on this day; a meeting in which we’ll be talking about future plans and possibilities; a day when we’ll be talking about growing up! A day when the Spirit wants to encourage us even, as the early Church knew too well, difficult and sacrificial realities lay ahead.

In the Crucified, Resurrected and Ascended Jesus, each of us have been given a manifestation for the common good. Are you thirsty today? Do you know anyone who is thirsty for a genuine spirituality rooted in a community that is on a journey into God’s Beauty, Truth and Goodness?

You will drink your fill as you fully participate in the New Community that God is creating for the good of the world.

As we learned again at our Synod, Anglicans are linked the world over; a portion of every dollar we give goes to work in the North, to the national church and our links overseas.

Every act of loving service strengthens St. Matt’s which strengthens our diocese which strengthens the national church…continue the chain of being.

We are more than we are! We are finite beings participating in the infinite. Veni Spiritus Sanctus! Come Holy Spirit!