

Calvary United Methodist Church
June 9, 2019

THE PENTECOST MESSAGE

10:30 AM Service

Rev. Dr. A. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

Matthew 22:15-22

We ask the kids to come forward. This has been particularly one of my fondest things to do. Come sit close today. And, yes, come on up. Juliette, good to see you.

So, today is the day of Pentecost. What in the world is that? Well, it was a harvest celebration, it was the beginning of a harvest, but if you have been paying attention and have been eating your fruits and vegetables...do you like fruits and vegetables? Do you? Do you like fruits and vegetables? What is your favorite? (Broccoli.) Really? Alright! Good for you. How about yours? What's your favorite? (Child speaks.) You like carrots. And yours? Do you have a favorite vegetable or fruit? (Oranges.) She likes oranges. How about onions? They are really good for you. (Child speaks.) He doesn't like onions either? (Child speaks.) He likes onions? How does your mom like onions? How about you? What is your favorite? (Child speaks.) Salads, really? I'm impressed. That's really good. Well, they give you power, you know.

The harvest festival means that all the fruits and vegetables are coming in and so now you are seeing strawberries, blueberries, blackberries. Within a few weeks you'll see cherries just in the stores. Later on you will go to farm stands and you can find things like cantaloupes and watermelon and, well, there are a lot of really wonderful vegetables that you are supposed to eat because they do make you stronger and better and they include your eyesight like carrots. Right? Things like that are really good for you and they give you power.

So, the Pentecost festival was about a harvest that was coming and it came forty days, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection and that's when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the whole earth, upon everybody that God's Spirit would be in each person and it's already there in you. It's already there to give you this kind of power you need to be a wonderful person and a really nice sister or brother.

Now, we think about that with flashlights, so have a flashlight. It doesn't seem to work. So, what does it need? (Batteries.) It needs batteries. Once you get the power then...I took them out, you knew that right? Once you get the power then you can put it back together and, up, I bet it has to be put in right. Well, you can't do this on your own. You need God's help with this. God wants to give you everything you need to do this right.

God wants you really to do well in school because when you are going to school and you get the summer off now, studying and learning is really good and it is important and you are going to be going to first grade this coming year? (Second.) Second already. (And I used to go to

pre-school.) Are you going to go again in the fall? (I don't know.) I bet you will. How about you? (Child speaks.) That's good.

You know, if you keep going...well, I think I've gotten to about the 25th grade. I really have, you know, if you count all the years. It's a lot of education. Ah, look, it works. You do this right, you get power. The power is already there, you just have to turn it on and God gives it to you. And you might just say, "Lord, lead me." A simple prayer. Or, "Guide me." Or sometimes, "Help!" And when you pray, God gives you power.

So, let's just take a minute and we will pray, ok?

So, thank you, Lord, that you give our kids power. There is lots of stuff for us to learn and not just the stuff we find in books, but how to live, how to listen, how to learn, how to really pay attention and you give us that power so that our lives show forth your blessing and they are good and it feels good. Bless our kids whom we love. Amen.

Ok, it's been a pleasure over this year to be with you guys. I have really fallen in love with you all, and that's the truth.

Message:

I don't intentionally mean to turn my back to you, but I want to talk to the kids. I'll occasionally look this way, but I want to talk to you. So let's join in a word of prayer first:

Gracious Lord, help us today to hear from you. Speak to our hearts this morning, especially we are proud of our kids and this year when they have studied to show themselves approved of you, so guide them and guide us to hear your Word and receive it with joy in Christ. Amen

So, when you guys were babies or maybe toddlers, someone brought you here to the front of the church and the pastor addressed your parents and then addressed the congregation on your behalf. And then your parents made promises that they would be patient with you, they would try not to drive you nuts. You made no promises. The congregation made promises to care for you and to be there for you and to watch you grow and to love you, to welcome you, to instruct you, to have a place for you, to bless you and lead you to that place where you would confirm the baptism made on your behalf way back then.

So, here you are today, confirming these baptismal vows for yourself. You will confirm, hence the term, the promises made at your baptism on your behalf. You will pledge to love God and neighbor, to learn to read scripture for yourself, to be in both private and public worship and since Christian baptism is all about being baptized into Jesus' life, death and resurrection, you are promising to walk more closely to him.

And next week, you will have the first of many opportunities and choices to live out the vows you are taking upon yourself today. So, where will you be next week?

Confirmation is not graduation. You are not graduating from church and you're not finished with all that God has for; you are just beginning. Confirmation is affirming the promises of God and of Jesus for yourself and it is just the beginning. I want to tell you from my own experience firsthand, keeping those promises isn't an easy or small task.

Now, in today's Gospel reading you heard from Jake who did pretty well here, nice to have another Cook up here, right? You heard how Jesus and the Pharisees were debating how to be somebody who has faith in this world and how to live in a world that is full of political and economic powers that divide our attention and our allegiances. Do we align ourselves with God who is our Creator? Or do we go with Caesar who is the worldly power around?

And so the discussion that Jesus had with those religious leaders then focuses on this coin. Whose image is on this coin? Well, you know what you can do with money, right? Your parents give you money for chores? You doing babysitting yet? Not yet? My daughter has three small kids. I couldn't believe what they are paying her babysitter? My sister did it for 50 cents an hour, but it was a long time ago. You can make good money. But that's the worldly power, alright?

So, you give to God's and what Caesar's is Caesar's, very much a part of the day in your young lives and giving to God sounds nice, doesn't it? But giving to Caesar is a whole lot more fun. And you know that already, right?

So, how do we do this? Well, being a follower of Jesus is not an easy task in this world and if we feel like we should come to church but we really feel like we want to sleep in or do you ever feel like doing your homework on Sunday morning? No? Just checking, right? We have the summer off so we are good, right? But if you say: well, I could go to church or I could go shopping; I could play sports; I could dance; I could get on my tablet, my iPad, my phone, right? Usually Caesar wins. And if you go to church out of obligation, it's only going to last a little while because there are so many more things that you are going to find to be much more interesting because you may as well know this now, the church is not as cool as the world. Jesus never seems as cool as Caesar.

So the church well never be entertaining enough to make you come and guilt won't be enough to get you out of bed on Sunday morning. Becoming a regular attender of church after this Sunday is something you are going to have to want to do, because now it is a choice. It's your free choice. But our responsibility as leaders is to make this place someplace where you are going to find life and you are going to find something that is more meaningful than anything Caesar has to do; that this is a place you really want to be. That's our job. So what will make you want to be here instead of feeling like you should but you don't?

If you can look past the advertisers and the marketers and all the very cool people in your life who say that what they have is cooler than anything else...if you can look past all the stuff that the world says is really great and cool, you'll see cool doesn't matter. It only appears to matter, but it's an illusion. It's like looking at a rainbow through a bubble and you've done that since you were a little child, blow bubbles right? And all of a sudden it pops and it doesn't exist anymore.

Somebody can look really cool on the outside, but inside they can be really hungry and empty and hurting. And somebody may look really incredibly happy with very cool cars and toys and gadgets and stuff that suggests that those who have such gadgets and stuff and cool cars are really cooler than other mere mortals like all of us.

But if you look around at this world, which at this age you know a lot more now than I did when I was your age, you see the pain and the aching loneliness for meaning that people bear. You've seen that in the students you are friends with at school and your neighbors and then you learn to see past the outer shell of that person to see the hungering dark within them. The only response Jesus had to that sort of stuff was not to cooler; it was to be compassionate and his compassion was so strong that what he wanted to do was to reach that person who was hurting and touch that he might heal that hungering darkness and fill them with something far better.

So to follow Jesus is to see past what people think is cool and to see the heart of God for a broken world, because I am sorry to tell you, that's the world we are giving you. It's the world I was given and everyone else here too. It's always broken.

So, in confirming your baptism you are affirming Jesus' compassionate love for a world that is hurting and you are confirming your desire to let Jesus use your hands...I mean it's amazing what your hands can do if you give them to God and it's just incredible, if you are not worried about being cool and you think: What can my hands do? It's amazing that in 20 years from now or 30 years or 4...can you imagine? How old are you now? 13. Can you imagine being 53? You will be. Guys, you like that hair? Okay. And I'm past 53. Your hands, your heart, the gifts God has placed in you, are exactly what God uses to heal this world, that you become the answer with His hands to the pain of the world we live in.

So look, this is the truth, I'm not going to lie to you: You don't have to come back to church next week, alright? No one needs to guilt you into coming church because now the choice is yours. But the only reason you will ever have for being a part of a church is that you want Jesus to use you to heal this broken world; that you want to be in worship because you just feel this love that comes right from him and you are excited about what he can do with your gifts and graces. Because you don't have to look to other people because other people will always look more cooler than you, but God doesn't care about that stuff. God cares about what is in you. God cares about the amazing things he can do through. That you want to be in a study group next fall because Jesus' way is the only way that makes sense in this crazy

world and you want to learn this way. And this is the only way that actually brings people together.

We have hope in you, all of us do. Not that you are going to keep the “Church machine” going for another generation. But that Jesus in you wants to make a real difference in this world through you and that we hope you will see the possibilities of how his love can heal people and turn their swords and their AR15 into garden tools to help feed the hungry. I have hope in you that you and your generation be far better disciples than mine and I have hope in you that you will choose God over Caesar no matter how cool Caesar seems.

In Jesus’ own baptism the Holy Spirit alighted on him like a dove. And in Pentecost that’s why we have like that dove above you there on the PowerPoint right now. In Pentecost that baptism we read about in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon those first disciples with a fire that was burning in their hearts for this world.

And so today, on this Pentecost Sunday, this confirmation day, may the Spirit of Jesus fall upon you with that energy that bursts forth from you and every part of your being in ways that change the world. I feel it with the gift God has given to you. Amen