

Pentecost Day

June 12, 2011: Family Sunday: Baptism of Sabrina and Natasha Denton

Ken Wratten at St Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 20:19-23

Early this morning I went to my garage and picked up a few things to show you. Here is the first thing:

(Hammer) – Do you recognize what this is? What is it used for?

Hammer nails to hang pictures, hammer boards together to build a bird house, table, cabinet, even a house.

(Screwdriver) – What is this? What do you do with it?

Install or remove screws, which hold things together.

(Saw) – Cut wood to the size you need.

(Plane) – You run it along the edges of rough wood to make it smooth and straight.

(Level) – You use this to make sure whatever you are building is level to the ground and not tipped to one side or the other.

So we have a hammer, screwdriver, saw, plane, level. Each one of these is different. Each does a different job. But all of them have something in common. When you put them all together in a group, what are they called? (Tools). When they work together in the hands of a skilled carpenter, they can be used to build beautiful, strong, useful projects.

The apostle Paul wrote that the church is like these tools. Each one of us is different. Each of us has our own skills and abilities. Each of us has a different job to do.

Teachers, leaders, shepherds, singers

Good listeners, organizers, care givers, cooks, eaters

Helpers, cleaner-uppers, thinkers, smilers

God has given each of us a special job to do in the church

Luke (in Acts) and John wrote in the Bible how the Holy Spirit came first to 11 disciples hidden in a locked room, and 50 days later, on Pentecost Day, to 120 followers of Jesus who were gathered together. The Holy Spirit gave these people skills and abilities they didn't have before. They got tools they could use to build the new Christian church.

They suddenly had courage to talk about Jesus;

They could speak in foreign languages they had never studied;

Peter had the right words to say that made 3,000 people in just one day believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul has a whole list of tools that the Holy Spirit has for us to use;

Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. All of these tools are given by God to build the Reign of God here on earth.

The wonderful news is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to you and me, just as it was given to those frightened, hiding disciples of Jesus, who were then empowered to become energized, charismatic preachers, who were able to travel everywhere with the story of Jesus.

Sometimes God comes to us in a soft breath; like when God blesses us with certain special people in our life who show us their love in such quiet but life saving ways. We feel God's love through their love. Sometimes God comes to us in a strong wind and flames of fire; as when we see a healing miracle happen to a dear friend, or we see someone filled with sadness or an addiction, transformed into a healthy and hope-filled person committed to a life of faith.

Every one of us, through our baptism, receives God's Holy Spirit. In a few minutes we will have the honor of baptizing Sabrina and Natasha Denton. We pray that these girls receive through their baptism living proof of God in their life that will sustain them in their faith, and that they receive the power of God that will guide them as Christians in their faith journey. In that liturgy, you and I also pray for that same proof and that same power to sustain us and guide us. We are further along in the faith journey, but we have the same need; the need for God's Spirit to give us the tools we need to always have faith and share it with others.

On this Pentecost Day you and I are reminded to celebrate the gifts we have already experienced in our faith life; and we also celebrate the gifts that are yet undiscovered. Have we claimed all of our gifts? And as Paul reminded the believers in Corinth, are we using those gifts to build up the church, rather than ourselves? As we begin the long season of Pentecost, we should expect to experience daily mini-Pentecosts. What gifts does God hold for you that are yet un-tapped, un-tried, un-discovered, and waiting for you to claim?

Jesus is offering you and me the tools we need, to work together in this faith family and with other faith families, to build up the Reign of God. This world desperately needs the things we can build with the tools we have been given. Come Holy Spirit! Amen.