

“ARE YOU WILLING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL?”

Acts 2: 1-21

It's graduation time! Know anyone graduating this year? It's going to be a different graduation for the graduates this year – virtual ceremonies seem to be the norm this year due to the COVID 19 Pandemic. There's a story about the son of a wealthy man, who was expecting to receive a sports-car for his graduation – Instead, his Dad called him into his study and told him that he loved him very much, and handed his son a wrapped-up present. When the son opened it, he found it to be a box containing a leather-bound Bible, with his name inscribed on the spine. Angrily, the young man tossed the box on his father's desk and stormed out saying, “With all your money, all you can give me is a Bible?” And, they never spoke again, despite the fact that the father tried very hard to contact him over the years. Years later, he got a call saying that his father had died, leaving him everything. As he was going through his father's belongings, he found that Bible, still in its box – Curious, he took the Bible out of the box and opened it. The page fell open at a passage his father had marked, and he looked at the page. He noticed that his Dad had underlined Matthew 7:11, which says, “If you, then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your father give what is good to those who ask him?” And as he read this, a car key fell from inside the Bible – It had a tag with the dealer's name on it – for the sports-car that he had wanted so badly years earlier. On the tag beside his graduation date were the words, “Paid in full, Love, Dad.” Pentecost is the season when we remember God's great gift to us following the death of his son, in our place on the cross! It is the gift of The Holy Spirit! Yet, so many of us Christians reject this gift of The Holy Spirit, for fear – often of being accused of being “Happy and Clappy.” And we're missing out on a wonderful gift from God designed to invigorate our lives and our ministry. But the power of The Holy Spirit, given to the church at Pentecost, is so much more than simply an emotional form of worship – It's the power given to the church to fulfil the “Great Commission”. “Are you willing to preach the Gospel?” In my opinion, there are 3 major Christian celebrations during the church year – Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Christ: Easter, when we celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord: And Pentecost, when we celebrate the birth of the church, as recorded in our scripture lesson this morning from Acts 2: And you might be wondering, “How on earth, can this spectacular event have given birth to the church?” So, what was this event “Pentecost”, that happened first in AD 29 or 30, all about? Well, it helps to start with considering what Pentecost was – Pentecost was the second major festival of the Jewish year – After Passover – And, you might recall the significant event that occurred at Passover that year – The death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The name, Pentecost, was derived from the Greek “Pentecostos” meaning 50, and it was 50 days after Passover – It was the time of offering the “first fruits of the wheat harvest to God”. And you still might ask, “How does Acts 2 have anything to do with the birth of the church?” Jesus' “Great Commission”, was in Matthew 28: 19 and 20, right before Jesus left this earth, he told his disciples, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely, I am with you till the end of the age.” This must have been a daunting challenge for the disciples. Yet, Jesus gave them very clear instructions on how they were to go about it – In Acts 1, Jesus said, “You shall receive the power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth.” In other words, Jesus himself would enable them to fulfill the “Great Commission”, by giving them the power of the Holy Spirit! “Are you willing to preach the Gospel?” In our scripture lesson from Acts 2, we see 3 principles for success in growing the church: The disciples obeyed Jesus: They needed the power from The Holy Spirit: They received their message from God's word: The first principle for success was that the disciples obeyed Jesus. In Acts 1:8, they learned that if they were going to be servants of Christ, they had to learn to do what Jesus told them to do – Jesus told them, “Wait in Jerusalem until the power of The Spirit comes upon you.” So, what did they do?

They spent their time in prayer – In anticipation: In Acts 1:14 it says, “They joined together, constantly in prayer.” The disciples got ready for action. Prayer is the power-house of the Christian-Life; prayer is the preparation for everything that we wish to do in Christ! It puts us in touch with our commander-in-chief! The second principle for success was the gift of The Holy Spirit, this power-on-high, which is needed to preach the Gospel. God simply asks us to be willing – We don’t have to preach the Gospel based on our own strength. The church isn’t our worry – It’s God’s worry! When I worry, I ask myself, why pray when you can worry? If we’re going to do God’s work, we need to do it in God’s strength, not our own. The Acts 2 experience made the disciples changed-people – Look at what happened to the apostle, Peter – I’m sure you recall how Peter denied Jesus 3 times before the cock crowed twice. And after the Acts 2 experience, we see a transformed St. Peter – In Acts 4, we see Peter, who denied Jesus before, proclaiming Jesus as God in front of the high priest himself, and after Peter had spoken, Luke records the effect it had on the Jewish council, in front of whom he was speaking – They saw the boldness of Peter, the result of the Pentecostal experience in Acts 2. The believers were given a boldness to witness to what they had experienced! The crowds reacted by saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? We hear them telling us in our own tongues the mighty works of God!” “Are you willing to preach the Gospel?” The third principle for success in preaching the Gospel is that the disciples proved their message in the scriptures – Many of the Jewish sects got away with false teachings because their people didn’t know the word of God. God had revealed himself in the scriptures and any genuine Christian-experience will be Biblically based. Peter quotes the Book of Joel (Joel 2:28), written 800 years earlier – Peter says what is happening here conforms to scripture. Joel prophesied it 800 years earlier – It’s comforting to know that growth in our churches is not our worry – It’s God’s worry! However, we are called to work with God in spreading the “Good News”, so we do have some responsibilities. We need to hear what God is saying to us and obey, as this releases God’s power to us – The disciples spent a lot of time in prayer to know the will of God, and if we are to preach the Gospel, we need to pray for strength and boldness – If we are to preach the Gospel successfully, we need to be grounded in scripture and develop our own message in God’s word – We need to carry the message of someone with us! There’s a story of a tribe of Indians who lived a long time ago in the present state of Mississippi – they lived next to a very swift and dangerous river. The current in the river was so strong that if anyone happened to fall in or stumble into it, they would be swept away downstream. One day, the tribe was attacked by another aggressive group of Indians, and they found themselves with their backs against the river – They were greatly outnumbered, and their only chance for survival was to cross the rushing river. They huddled together and those who were the strongest picked up the weak and put them on their shoulders – The little children, the sick, the old, the infirmed – those who were ill or wounded were carried on the backs of those who were the strongest. They waded out into the raging river, and to their surprise, they discovered that the weight on their shoulders by carrying the least and lowest, helped them to keep their footing and to make it safely across the river. Jesus was trying to teach the disciples an objective lesson about greatness, about servanthood, and about leadership – Jesus is saying to them and to us, “Have you lost the child-like joy and love and faith that once were yours?” Jesus’ point needs to be emphasized – “If you want to walk on secure ground in this world, it helps to carry someone with you!” Pentecost gave the disciples and it gives us the Holy Spirit! It gives us the power to obey our risen-Lord, Jesus Christ, the foundation of our church. And Pentecost anchored the scriptures as God’s truth, so.....”Are you willing to preach the Gospel?” Witness to the the power of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ – Witness to the power of the Holy Spirit! And witness to the truth of the scriptures! All of these will give you the willingness to preach the Gospel message, and be part of the church of our Lord, Jesus Christ – Go, and make disciples of all you come in contact with! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.....Amen!