**What Does the Church Teach? 2017 06 04**

**Acts 2:1-21, John 20: 19-23 Pr. H. Adachi**

May the Spirit from the Father be poured into the hearts of the people in this sanctuary!

Congratulations for the day of Pentecost, the “Seireikorinbi” which means the day when the Holy Spirit came down to Earth and for the birthday of the church. This is the fiftieth day from the resurrection. Pentecost means fiftieth in Greek and originally the festival that celebrates the fiftieth day after Passover in Jewish tradition. Therefore, the word “Pentecost” did not originally mean the day when the Holy Spirit came down.

By the way, in English, this day is called only “Pentecost”, therefore we do not have any literal English word that means the day when the Holy Spirit came down. However, in Japanese, since we use the word “Seireikorinbi”, sometimes I worry that some Japanese people think that Pentecost is the first day and only day that the Holy Spirit came down to Earth…

However, it is obvious from today’s Gospel reading, Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit among the disciples, 49 days before the Pentecost. Also, last week, Wednesday was May 31st, in the Christian Church, we remember this day as the day when Mary found out she was pregnant with Jesus and she visited Elizabeth who was also pregnant with John in her womb.

What happened on that day was described in Luke 1:39-56, and according to scripture, Elizabeth joyfully blessed Mary in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even before Jesus was born, scripture describes the existence of the Holy Spirit. We can even go back to the beginning of Genesis. Genesis Chapter 1 verse 2 says, “the Spirit of God was moving on the face of the waters.” So actually, the Holy Spirit was there even when heaven and earth were created.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit did not only come down on the fiftieth day after the resurrection. The Holy Spirit has existed and interacted with the Earth and those upon it for a very long time. Therefore, human beings cannot limit its existence. On the other hand human beings cannot always recognize its existence and sometimes we are very indifferent to its existence and do not respond to what the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to do.

A short time ago, we read the Gospel. In that reading, Jesus let the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, but it seems like they did not understand the meaning of the Spirit’s message that it was sending them as disciples of Jesus. Because, just three days from that time, they denied Jesus and ran away from him when they realized that he would be crucified.

For three years, they followed Jesus as their leader. And they were completely powerless when they knew he would be crucified. One of the disciples shouted, “I do not know him.” All disciples were repenting and worried, since they did not know what to do.

They were fearful because they might be crucified if Jewish leaders found them. They anxious and beside themselves, and in current terminology, the disciples most likely suffered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Among those fearful disciples, Jesus appeared and said to them, “Peace be with you.” He said this twice. His words, to them, were full of mercy and grace.

Depsite the fact that they abandoned Jesus, he forgave them. This forgiveness is based on God’s deep and gracious love. In his actions, Jesus still recognized them as disciples and was trying to send them out into the world to teach God’s love and forgiveness. In order to send them out, Jesus was already breathing the Holy Spirit on the first day he was resurrected.

However, the disciples could not understand how the Holy Spirit was working on them. There needed to be seven weeks of time and also another incident of the Holy Spirit actively doing God’s work. Then on the 50th day after the Passover celebration, while many people were gathering in Jerusalem, the amazingly powerful Holy Spirit was poured into the disciples.

Acts Chapter 2, the text that was read short time ago, describes what happened on that day. Probably every detail of the incident could not be explained by words, therefore, many metaphorical expressions were used in Acts. Even though it could not be expressed in detail by words, I think one thing was clear that the disciples started responding to the Holy Spirit.

Disciples took decisive actions, which were the beginnings of the church. Church is expressed as Kyokai in Japanese– which means congregation of teaching. Let’s think about what it teaches? Disciples were worried because of their failure, misjudgments, shame, etc. However, Jesus mercifully forgave them.

This forgiveness came from *agape*, God’s graceful and merciful love. The church, Kyokai, is where people gather to learn and teach God’s love. That church started AD 30 by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Even though it did not happen right away when Jesus resurrected and forgave his disciples; it began seven weeks later. From Jesus’ humiliation, suffering, and death the Christian church was born.

In the midst of the powerful Holy Spirit, his forgiven disciples finally started working as members of the church of Jesus Christ, a church that teaches grace and love. And that church has continued and still lives.

The church is now 1987 years old. You might think “oh the church is old.” However, considering scientists say the Earth is 5 billion years old. I think the church is still very young by comparison. And we are part of the church and living in the Holy Spirit. And we are the ones still learning and teaching God’s graceful love in the midst of the active Holy Spirit.

Let’s remember and reflect upon, and celebrate the church’s 1987th birthday today. I pray that each one of us, as disciples of Jesus, is helped, energized, and sent by the Holy Spirit into our communities to proclaim the Good News, and the enduring grace and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.