

PENTECOST – JESUS IS ALWAYS WITH US

You probably can't see it very well from where you sit, but I wear on my little finger a gold pinky ring. It's a very special ring to me, because it belonged to my grandfather. He was the bishop of Western Colorado, over 100 years ago, back when the state of Colorado was divided into two dioceses. On the inside of the ring it says, "Consecrated Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1907," which coincidentally is the same date I was ordained to the priesthood. Not the same year, of course -- I was ordained in 1962 -- but the same date, December 19.

Bishop Edward Jennings Knight had this ring made when he was consecrated bishop, and he wore it on his trips around western Colorado to visit the scattered little Episcopal churches in that mountainous territory. Towns with romantic names like Glenwood Springs, Grand Junction, Durango, Silverton. Cars were few and far between in 1907, and he traveled mostly by stagecoach. My father, who was then only 8 years old, used to tell me of his trips with his father on a stagecoach.

Unfortunately my grandfather wasn't a bishop very long, because he contracted Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and died after he'd been there only a short time. My grandmother, and her two children, one of whom was my father, went back to live in Trenton, New Jersey, where they had come from. My father inherited this ring, and wore it all the time, so when my father died in 1984 I asked if I could have it.

So you see why this ring is so special to me. Partly because it's gold and 110 years old and has bounced around on a stagecoach all over western Colorado, but mostly because it belonged to my grandfather, and then to my father, and it reminds me of them. Somehow with this ring I feel their presence, and their love, even though they aren't here physically with me.

Lots of us have things like that at home. A special stuffed animal or a tea cup someone gave you, a picture of someone, some object that belonged to a loved one who is no longer with you. And you somehow feel their presence, don't you, when you look at it and touch that object.

Jesus has given us gifts to help us remember him and to remind us of his continued love and presence with us today. The disciples were gathered together unsure what to do next, now that Jesus had left their sight. And suddenly the Spirit, like a mighty wind, burst into the room. It filled the disciples with power, and the church was launched.

Sometimes the Spirit bursts in like a hurricane – sometimes, as in my own case, the Spirit is like a ‘still, small voice’, gently urging us to a closer relationship with God.

Notice that the Spirit did not say, “What happens in church stays in church.” No -- the Spirit sent them out, filled with the love of Jesus, to preach the Gospel to all the world, even into the mountains of western Colorado and the wilderness of Cow Hollow.

Yesterday morning at Grace Cathedral 18 young people from St. Mary’s were confirmed. The Bishop laid his hands on each one of them and asked for the power of the Spirit to come upon them, just as the Spirit came upon Jesus’ followers 2000 years ago. And here we are today, Pentecost 2017, celebrating the church’s birthday. The church – you and me and all of us together, here and around the world -- is today Jesus’ physical body here on earth. Amazing, isn’t it.

Through the church, Jesus gives us many ways to remember him, and to remind us of his continuing presence with us – whenever two or three are gathered together in his name, and even when we’re alone, Jesus is with us.

He has given us the Eucharist – the bread and wine of communion, and promised us that he would be with us in a special way in the bread and the wine, his presence somehow focused and present to us the way my grandfather is present to me in a special way in this ring.

Jesus has given us baptism to help us remember him, and to remind us that we are all called to be his ministers. This morning [at the 9 o’clock service] we baptized Grace Cathryn Kornblum, and welcomed her as the newest member of Christ’s Body the Church.

In the water of baptism, Jesus is with us, reminding us of his love for all people, and sending us out into the world to be Jesus to everyone: seeking and serving Christ in all persons, respecting the dignity of the earth, and of every human being. And in timely

words added to the Cathedral's service yesterday, cherishing the wondrous works of God, and protecting the beauty and integrity of all creation. This fragile earth, our island home.

Sometimes it's hard to remember that Jesus is with us. Bad things do happen. People get sick or die, we lose our job, someone disappoints us and hurts us deeply. Bad things happen in the world – earthquakes, murders, political stuff we find very discouraging. These are painful things, sad things – things that may even make us doubt God's love.

Jesus' disciples felt doubt and pain. There were only eleven disciples who went with Jesus to the mountaintop to say goodbye to him – a painful reminder that Judas had betrayed Jesus, and left him. Even the remaining eleven had their doubts about him.

But Jesus tells them – and us -- that he will be with them. “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” He doesn't tell us that things will be easy, or that everything will always go the way we want it to. After all, Jesus in his earthly life knew plenty of hardship and pain and sorrow and frustration – he even knew doubt. That's part of life, part of the burden of being human. Jesus tells his disciples – us -- that he will be with us to the end of the age, sharing with us in everything. Even with all our pain, all our shortcomings and frustrations, our doubts and uncertainties, Jesus has promised to be with us forever. And he gives us his church to help us remember that, always.

In many ways we Christians today are like those first disciples. Each one of us has our own weaknesses. Great differences and tensions abound in Christ's church, as this wonderful congregation at St. Mary's can testify. There is no perfect church, and if there were a perfect church, as soon as you or I joined it it wouldn't be perfect any more. Jesus knows this, just as he knew it on that amazing first Pentecost. But still Jesus doesn't hesitate a moment in giving us his work to do in our time.

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has called us “the Jesus movement”. Jesus accepts the reality of each one of us, and of the whole church. He takes our strengths, our gifts and abilities, as well as all the potential there is among us when we work together. Jesus looks at us, understands us and loves us, accepts us as we are. Then he calls us to go and do his work, and to remember that he is with us always, even to the end of the age.

We are sent out to live the Gospel throughout the world, so that people do hear it in their own language and situation.

We're an unfinished people, living in an unfinished world. Nobody has all the answers. We see through a glass dimly. Cynics may complain about that. But empowered people will see it as a challenge. Everything that Jesus taught and lived is incomplete. The task is unfinished. And it will be still be unfinished when you and I are dead and gone. But while we are here, each of us can help to move the kingdom of God forward. Just ordinary people, like ourselves, can proclaim the good news of Christ, that God is with us and loves us, here and now. On Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, who could ask for a greater challenge than that?

Remember that what happens in Church cannot stay in church. Go. The world awaits.