**Pentecost Sunday**

**May 23, 2021**

**Rev. Dr. Leslie D. Callahan, guest preacher**

**Sermon Title: “Empowered Witnesses”**

**Scripture: John 20:19-23**

**19** It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” **20** After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. **21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” **22** Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

**Passage Background and Sermon Summary**

This passage marks one of the appearances of the Resurrected Jesus. This instance, Jesus appears to the disciples as they were “hold up” in a locked room for fear of the Jewish authorities. Jesus stood among them offering peace, showing them his nail-scarred hands, then breathing on them the power of the Holy Spirit, foreshadowing the Day of Pentecost.

The disciples had witnessed Jesus’ life, up close and personal. They also stood as powerless bystanders witnessing his dying. As this passage begins, they are “sheltering in place” in a locked room hiding from the Jewish authorities. Despite their being locked away, Jesus finds them. Whenever Jesus finds us, hope, love and grace find us as well. In this instance, Jesus brought peace to the disciples and they were overjoyed. He then instructed them to receive the Holy Spirit and all gifts and fruit it provides. When Jesus breathed on them the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples became empowered witnesses.

Like the disciples, when Jesus breathes on us, we too receive the power of the Holy Spirit. At times, we might not realize that it is manifested, but when we do, we too become empowered witnesses. We can use that same power to employ in our daily lives and within our communities.

**Reflection Questions**

1. Describe a time when Jesus “found” you even when you were “in hiding.”
2. Where is there a need for peace in your life?
3. What is your traditional understanding of the ways the Holy Spirit manifests itself?
4. Has your understanding of the Holy Spirit’s manifestation shifted over time, and if so how?
5. Describe an event you witnessed or an experience you had during which, or after which you felt empowered.
6. How can the Church employ the power of the Holy Spirit as we fulfill our mission of individual growth and social transformation?