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Pentecost C • May 23, 2010
Acts 2:1-21

What a day of celebration and thanksgiving! It is the time of year for kids to celebrate endings before another summer begins. There's a countdown for how many days remain of school. Can anyone tell me the number? (*kids shouted 10 and 11*) We participate in "graduations" from preschool, elementary, or high school. It's natural for all of us to think about confirmation as an ending – for it is one. Anna and Dominic committed to three years of being intentionally formed through confirmation class. They have been faithful to their obligations. They have learned about the Bible and the Christian faith, and about their church.

Yet today is more about beginnings than endings. Dominic and Anna are beginning a new stage in their lives as Christians. They are making an active choice that affirms the faith that they received and have been taught since their baptisms. But there are so many more implications to the words that they say today.

Last week, in confirmation class, we talked about what it means to live our Christian vocation, as baptized members of Christ. The word "vocation" means "calling". In the middle ages, it was used only to describe religious vocations – special jobs only for priests or nuns or monks. Now the word "vocation" is usually

used for any kind of job or career. It may have nothing to do with religion – people have vocations to be all sorts of things: teachers or mechanics or computer techs. The list can go on and on.

One of things that I love about being Lutheran is Martin Luther's special emphasis on what it means to be baptized. He lived at the time when a vocation or a calling were only for the special religious folk. He said that every baptized person shares a vocation in Christ. That vocation is to live our faith, to share God's grace with the world, to serve our neighbors. As individuals, we can live that general vocation wherever we are in life. It doesn't matter how old we are. You can share God's love when you're 3, 33, 63, or 103. At each age, that may happen in a different place, with different people, and in a different way. We share our faith in our jobs or life as students, in our roles in our families, in our relationships with the neighbors around us. Our baptismal vocation is a clear ministry that takes a lifetime to complete. With their confirmation today, Anna and Dominic receive blessings for the coming adventures of faith and love that they will have.

Our lesson from Acts tells us of another new beginning and blessing for the early church. Did you notice that the word "Pentecost" actually appears in our reading itself? Most of the time, our church holy days (like Christmas) aren't

mentioned in the Bible. Most of them were named by Christians long after the Bible was written.

Pentecost is different though. At the time of Jesus, Pentecost was an agricultural festival after the first harvest of barley. (*Lev 23:15-16*) The first fruits brought to the temple from everywhere, from far lands. It occurred 50 days after Passover, and was associated with giving of Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, at Mount Sinai. Faithful Jews had travelled from all over, to worship and bring their thank-offerings to Jerusalem. That's why there were Jews of all different languages gathered at Jerusalem. They were being faithful to their worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Amid these acts of faithful worship, God blessed the Jews from Galilee with new gifts. They were probably still in shock about Jesus' resurrection – and then his ascension into heaven. Yet Jesus promised not to leave them alone, for the Holy Spirit would be with them. These folks were not from the big city at all. In their rural town of Galilee, they would not have been taught all these languages. Yet on Pentecost, they received a gift to speak to others clearly. The Holy Spirit enabled the early Christians to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all. These disciples were given the gifts and resources that they need in order to bless the world in the name of Christ. I believe that God promises to do that even in our day.

Like the Jews at Pentecost, we are gathered here for faithful worship. There have been changes in Emanuel's life together lately. Our May newsletter, and last week's sermon, both involved reflection on our congregation's financial difficulties. There is uncertainty about what our future will be in a year or so. Many of us are in shock and grief about it all. We are facing an ending of some sort – perhaps just an ending of how things have been for the last few years.

Our youth, like Dominic and Anna – and we as the church – face endings all the time. They can feel scary and uncertain. We may not be sure how we fit into God's world, when big things in life change.

The feast of Pentecost – and our celebration of confirmation – bring news to us. God is present and active among us. God will fulfill the promises to bless and renew the church. As the baptized and beloved, God has a hope for our lives. God will be with us and work through us. And when we least expect it, God's fire will show in us to all the world.

Today we are reminded of the continuing presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit that bless Christ's church. God blesses us with gifts to live our vocation as baptized Christians in the world. With Anna and Dominic, we are agents of God for the people around us. And there is no shortage of ways that we can honor God's

presence in our lives. We live in a world that is hungry to be fed by faith. The people around us search for meaning and long to fill the empty holes in life. Like us, they seek to find meaningful ways of making “a difference” in the lives of others, even in the face of overwhelming sin everywhere. They wonder how to find the energy to do all the good that they want to. They want to honor the sacred that they sense in our lives.

We live in a world that wants to see and hear and be touched by God in its life. We are a part of Christ’s church that seeks to live God’s grace for the world.

Let us pray. God, through your Holy Spirit, pour your fire upon us. Bless us with the gifts that we need—and the guidance that we seek—to live as your faithful church.