



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“Think Differenty”

Day of Pentecost – May 19, 2024

Acts 2:1-21

A Homily by
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In the late 1990's and early 2000's an Apple marketing computer campaign was all the rage. Print media and billboard ads used two words only: “Think different.” The two words appeared in boldface type below portraits of prominent figures who did indeed think differently: Albert Einstein, Maria Callas, Jim Hensen, Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mohammed Ali, Amelia Earhart, Bob Dylan, Pablo Picasso, Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Edison, Martha Graham, Joan Baez, Miles Davis, Ansel Adams, Jackie Robinson, Charlie Chaplin, Jane Goodall, and the list goes on. It was a brilliant advertising campaign, brilliantly conceived and brilliantly carried out, the most memorable and impactful initiative in the history of the company. I have wondered ever since why Jesus was not part of the campaign. If anyone truly thought differently, it was our Lord.

Why didn't Steve Jobs have Jesus of Nazareth's image on a Think Different poster? Only a few pages into Walter Isaacson's biography of the soul behind Apple computers, I found the answer to my question. Steve Jobs became disaffected with the Lutheran Church as a teenager and came to believe as so many do today, that religion is at its best when it is expressed through spiritual experiences rather than received dogma from an established religious institution. He said that “The juice goes out of Christianity” when Christians do not live like Jesus or see the world as Jesus saw it, which rings of what Gandhi said, “I like your Jesus but not your Christians.”

Like Steve Jobs, many these days describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. People are seeking after something spiritual. Spiritual experiences are deeply rooted in the senses. Was there ever a more sensory experience than the coming of the Holy Spirit that is described on the Day of Pentecost? Those who first experienced the Holy

Spirit had a spiritual experience like no other, larger than anything they had felt in all their lives.

Spiritual seekers today have a feeling that there is something greater, but they are allergic to institutions of religion. Spirituality is an emotion; religion is an obligation. Spirituality soothes; religion mobilizes. Spirituality can be satisfied with itself, religion is dissatisfied with the world. But the mobilized religious go about doing good – in the name of God.

So should we put the spiritual back into religion? We absolutely must. What the disciples experienced on Pentecost was spiritual but not necessarily religious. There was no institution of the Christian Church – not yet. The disciples received the Holy Spirit with their senses. Gathered together in a large house were many disciples and faithful followers of Jesus the Christ. There were the eleven remaining disciples and many others who had journeyed with Jesus throughout his ministry, including many women. All together they waited. They likely were praying. In their individual and communal silence they waited for Jesus's promises to be fulfilled. And then all their senses were assaulted. They felt the Holy Spirit like the force of a violent wind. They heard the Holy Spirit; it was like the roar of a tornado it was. They saw and felt and smelled and tasted the Holy Spirit like fire. Anyone might be afraid – sensing such forces – but they were not frightened. No they were in a state of ecstatic joy. They looked at one another and saw each other's hair and clothing flying about in the wind and divided tongues of fire on one another's heads. And they broke out into uncontrollable babbling – they laughed with delight. They could not contain their joy. They wanted to share their spiritual experience with everyone, so they ran out into the street. Their hearts were on fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit, the fire of the love of God that Jesus had taught them, and they had to share that love with others. To the rest of the world they must have appeared crazy.

The men that Jesus chose as disciples were not equipped to understand. So the disciples and the others who first experienced the Holy Spirit reacted as crazy people might act. Try as he might Luke (the author of the Gospel that bears his name and the Acts of the Apostles) could not describe the divine. Luke struggled to put into words what the disciples and followers of Jesus experienced when they received the Holy Spirit. But he was – and we are – limited in our attempts to describe a divine mystery in human terms.

We must seem crazy when we try to explain the Holy Spirit to someone who does not know God, someone who does not know that everyone is saved, someone who has not felt the power of the Holy Spirit alive and active in his or her life. But we must try. It is what we are called to do – to be fools for Christ – to think differently. However inadequately we try to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit, we know that this was a milestone event. But was it fulfillment of the story of salvation? Well, yes, and no – because salvation continues. The coming of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the church. The Holy Spirit guided and strengthened the new church as it spread through much of the Roman Empire. And she continues to guide and strengthen the church today. The fulfillment of Jesus's words came to the disciples and the many others in a powerfully spiritual way on the day we call Pentecost. The disciples remembered what Jesus had promised, and so they gathered in Jerusalem. It was Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, when the Jewish people – Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – all gathered to commemorate the anniversary of the day that God gave them the Torah – the day that the nation of Israel became committed to serving God. Yet the disciples who spoke a dialect of Galilean Aramaic understood one another. All nations and tribes and peoples had been divided, but after the coming of the Holy Spirit all humanity became one because truly God was in their midst.

What did all the people in the Apple ads have in common and what do they have in common with those who have experienced the Holy Spirit? The people in the Apple ads were “the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who saw things differently. They were not fond of rules. And they had no respect for the *status quo*. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they changed things. They invented. They imagined. They healed. They explored. They created. They inspired. They pushed the human race forward. Maybe they had to be crazy. How else could they have stared at an empty canvas and seen a work of art? Or sat in silence and heard a song that had never been written? Or gazed at a red planet and seen a laboratory on wheels? These people – who were crazy enough to think they could change the world – are the ones who did.” (*Paraphrased from Apple, Inc.*)

We Christians too are the ones who can change the world, through believing and living into those beliefs with the help of the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us. Can we do this through the church? We can when the church is at its best.

Lord, may it be so. Amen.