

Pentecost 2020: Tenants or Builders

Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3-13; John 20:19-23

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, May 31, 2020

Last Sunday we commemorated Blessed Jackson Kemper and I spoke of him at the Welcome. The Feast of Pentecost is an appropriate time to tell more of the story surrounding his ministry.

At the 1853 General Convention of the Episcopal Church a momentous decision was made. The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society created in 1821 would no longer simply be an arm of the Episcopal Church it would be the Episcopal Church. In fact, “The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society” remains the legal name of the Episcopal Church. All members of this branch of the Catholic Church are designated missionaries.

Jackson Kemper was consecrated the first domestic missionary bishop. This priest from New York headed out to the wilderness. He was sent to Missouri and Indiana but he also laid foundations in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas. He founded a seminary and a college in Wisconsin. He also established missions among the Oneida people of Wisconsin which still exist.

Bishop Kemper had an important colleague: a priest from Philadelphia named James Lloyd Breck. He is known as the “Apostle of the Wilderness.” He helped Kemper found Nashotah House Seminary which became a center of liturgical observance, pastoral care and education to the isolated families in the area.

Later in Minnesota, Fr. Breck founded St. Columba's Mission on the White Earth Reservation and Seabury Divinity School in Faribault. Then he went to California where founded five parishes. He died at age 55.

These stories make me feel very lazy.

Every generation of the Church has to decide if we are going to be tenants living in the ministries which our ancestors built or are we going to do some building of our own? Are we simply maintaining what has been given to us or are we discerning what comes next?

This Feast of Pentecost, in the midst of this pandemic, is a good time to take stock of where we are in our efforts at building the Church.

As we wait to regather for worship, we must ask God to pour out his Spirit upon us. Now is a time to hope for dreams and visions so that we will know how to preach the Gospel in this unknown context.

We were never here to only worship. According to the catechism, prayer and worship are the first steps in carrying out our mission. After we worship, we are sent out to do the rest of the work God has given us to do. To proclaim the Gospel to all people, and to promote peace, justice and love. (BCP, p.855)

One cannot study the Gospels or recite the Baptismal Convent and not see that we worship a God who sends us out on mission.

It was true before this pandemic, and now it is now even more true, this generation of the Church cannot live as tenants. We must pray ever more fervently that the Holy Spirit will blow through this community empowering us and shaking us up.

Jesus has entrusted us with this ministry of reconciliation. And by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit he has empowered us to carry it out, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you...Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Each of us has been given manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. How will your particular gift serve the common good in this time?

If Jackson Kemper and James Lloyd Breck hadn't followed the Holy Spirit out into unknown places you and I may very well not be here enjoying the life-changing power of this fellowship of love and prayer.

Now we are called to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into this strange new wilderness around us. What comes next? The world is now literally burning down around us. We are facing at least several more months of navigating this pandemic. What are we being called to rebuild and what are we being asked to let go of? Where is the Holy Spirit speaking to us right now?

These are the kinds of questions members of a Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society ask themselves.

References to Kemper and Breck: *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 1994* (pp. 244, 208)
Church Publishing Corp.