

Happy Birthday! Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church. This is the point when God's mission of creation and redemption began to be manifest in the church. Of course it wasn't an organization or an institution at that point, it was just a group, but an identifiable group, of Jesus' disciples. They were all together in one place when the Spirit came upon them. And soon they weren't locked in a room anymore – they were out in the street preaching.

Some people see the movement of God's mission as manifest first in creation, secondly in the People of Israel, third in Jesus and now in the church. Amusing and strange though it may seem, we are the ones that God has chosen to carry out God's work in the world. We are the ones who are called to carry out the legacy of those original disciples.

During our potluck today, we are going to be considering how the Holy Spirit might be inviting us to take our part in that great dream of God in the next five years. But even more important than *what* we do is *how* we do it. Our core values make all the difference. So this morning I want to take a brief look at some of the core values of our spiritual ancestors. But core values sounds rather cold so let's instead think of them as habits of the heart.

Peter preached up a storm that Pentecost morning and by the end of the day three thousand people had become disciples. And this is what they did; "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42) Does that sound familiar? It should, because it's almost identical to our first baptismal vow to "continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." In our baptism, and every time we renew our vows, we are promising to continue in the footsteps of those earliest disciples. This is what we will do. This is at the center of our corporate life together – not committee meetings, not Roberts Rules of Order, but the apostle's teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Wait, wait there's more... "all the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day... they ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God." So here we can see clearly the values that formed the habits of their hearts. Community, generosity, gladness, sincerity, praise.

Within a short period of time there were Christian communities all over the known world, and we have several letters that Paul wrote to the churches he founded, which give us clues about how they were living and the problems and challenges they faced.

Today's epistle was part of the letter he wrote to the church in Corinth, in which we were reminded that we all have different gifts but each one of us is an important part of the Body of Christ. He doesn't spell it out, but the habit of the heart that Paul is underlining is that of inclusiveness and equality. No-one is better than another. In fact, he goes on in the passage immediately after the ones we heard, to suggest a kind of affirmative action where those who society deems the least must be given the greatest honor in the church.

We echo that habit of the heart in our Baptismal vows to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself;" and to "strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." Loving our neighbor is not just a nice sentiment but it requires that we roll up our sleeves and work for justice and peace.

By the time of St. Benedict in the 5th century things had changed a lot. The church had grown and had adapted to the situations and society within which it found itself. Many people found it difficult to live the devout lives they desired within the hurly burly of everyday life and they gathered together in communities. St Benedict was by no mean the first person to put together guidelines for this kind of living. What sets him apart is that in creating what he called a "school for the Lord's service" and recording the curriculum in a short Rule, he articulated the habits of

the heart which would underlie Western monasticism and influence the church for millennia.

The first habit is clearly worship. He devotes eleven chapters to the services of the hours and the order of praying the psalms. This is at the heart of the corporate life of the monastery. But before that, in a less well-known chapter he addresses the spiritual life of the individual. We might agree with all his steps to humility – for example #10 is “do not readily laugh” but the habit of humility and surrender to God is surely at the core of our own spiritual quest.

Benedict advocated the balance of work, prayer and study. He provided careful directions for the practice of hospitality, and he advocated stability – the art of staying where you’re put. At the time there were brothers who moved from one monastery to another always looking for the better situation. What a temptation it is to us in our mobile society to say “this just isn’t fun anymore” and move on; move on to another relationship, another job, another church. Yet the reality is, as they say, that wherever you go, there you are. Yes, the Spirit may tell us it’s time to go, but until then our spiritual journey is with those companions God has given us however annoying, irritating or wonderful they may be.

I have been thinking about my own habits of the heart. What are the things that are most important to me? There are two ways of doing this – one is to ask the question and see what comes up, the other is to look at the life you’re living and see what habits you are actually manifesting. If I say that I value gratitude but actually complain much of the time, then maybe gratitude is more of an aspiration than a real habit of the heart.

So here’s my list, as I have it today: praise/worship, loving relationship, community, kindness, integrity, service, simple living, busy-ness

- For me, everything must flow from praise and worship. Paul tells us to give thanks all the time and in all circumstances. That’s still

something of an aspiration for me but I am sure that praise is the highest calling we all have.

- When I look back on my life, nearly every major move I have made has been because of loving relationship. It is a major motivator for me, and it flows naturally into a love of community.
- Kindness sounds so mild but it is so basic. First, do no harm. Be respectful – this is part of that baptismal vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.
- But if I am out of integrity then everything I do or say rings false. Integrity for me is being true to myself and true to my values and telling myself the truth about life even when I wish it were different.
- Service – as you know I long for a fair and equal society; I long for all beings to have a home and food and a meaningful life and so being of service to God and people and critters and the planet is of high importance to me.
- Simple living goes right along with that - trying to make do with a bit less, using less of the world's resources, finding ways to be kind to the planet, living simply so that others may simply live. Trying to live with an attitude of restraint. Just because I can eat steak doesn't mean I will.
- Busy-ness. This one is different. This is my response to “when I look at my life and the way I live it what values does it show that I have?” I consistently over-schedule myself so it would seem that I value busy-ness; I schedule play as well as work and worship but I am far from the sense of measured peacefulness that is the mark of Benedictine balance.

Now it's your turn. What are the habits of your heart? What do you hold dear? How do you use your time? And what do you value about how

you do things rather than what you do? You have a paper you may use for this if you wish....

We just considered our individual habits of the heart, but we are called to be the Episcopal expression of the Body of Christ or as Michael Curry, our presiding Bishop, says the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement. And we are called to be that right here, in Los Osos.

We also have habits of the heart, ways that we do things, values that we hold dear, which make us uniquely who we are. During lunch we're going to be thinking more about those, so let's ask the Holy Spirit to inform and guide us. Let us pray:

Holy One, we thank you for calling us to be your people and to participate in your mission of the redemption of all Creation. We ask that your Holy Spirit will show us the habits of the heart which you have given us so that we may more consciously embody you here in Los Osos and beyond. WE ask these things in Jesus' Name. *Amen.*