

TOOLS FOR THE JOURNEY

Sermon for Pentecost B—Acts 2:1-21, Rom 8:22-27, Jn 16:4b-15

LPC, 5/31/09

At the ten-o'clock service today we will recognize two young people who are graduating from Wheeling Park High School this afternoon. As has been our practice here at Lawrencefield for the past few years, we will pray for them and give them a small token of our love as they go forth into the big world beyond Wheeling.

Shopping for a gift for an occasion like this is somewhat problematic. A Bible is an obvious choice, but also a common gift from parents or godparents at Confirmation. Other types of books risk being inappropriate or unappealing to youth. One wants to give something practical, yet sufficiently symbolic of the place these young people hold in our hearts and in our lives as the Church, the Body of Christ.

Browsing in the "Faith – Youth" section of Books-A-Million, my eye fell on something that fills both practical and symbolic requirements. How this item happened to show up in the Faith section is open for speculation. It carries no overt religious marking. But someone stocking shelves at Books-A-Million was thinking creatively.

Here's what I decided on as part of Lawrencefield's gift to our graduating seniors: a compass. As our graduates go forth, these compasses will hopefully symbolize a couple of things for them.

First, a compass will show them the way home. There will always be a place for you at home. There will always be a place for you here at Lawrencefield Church.

Second, wherever they go, a compass will help to keep them on track. So will the faith that they have learned from their families and faith communities. To make sure that this symbolism is not lost on our graduates, I have included a small cross with each compass. With Jesus Christ as their compass and guide, they will not go wrong.

Now I must confess that the further symbolism of these gifts is compromised by their packaging. They are clearly not marketed as graduation gifts but as survival kits. Each compass is packaged with a utility knife.

Never fear. I did not attend seminary for nothing. I can find theological significance in anything. The knives signify that our young people may have to cut through some distractions to stay on track in life and remember what is important. We hope that we as the church, along with their families, have given them the tools to do this.

In any event, with these kits of compasses and knives Lawrencefield has given them some tools for the journey upon which they are about to embark. They are on the verge of a great adventure, and we have given them something that we hope will help them be prepared for what comes.

The biblical tie-in today is Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the fledgling church of Christ. In today's passage from John, Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure. The disciples, like our graduates, are on the verge of a great adventure. After Jesus returns to the Father, the disciples are to pick up Jesus' mission to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven. They are to testify on behalf of Jesus.

But Jesus does not leave the disciples without tools for the journey. He promises them the gift of the Holy Spirit, to guide them in the truth. In addition to calling the Spirit a guide to truth, Jesus also calls the Spirit the "Advocate." There is a sense in which God's Spirit, as Advocate, can be counted on to fight alongside and defend the disciples of Christ.

The Spirit has other attributes that provide tools for the disciples' journey of life. In the passage from Romans, St. Paul describes how the Spirit will intercede for the followers of Christ, easing their way in troubled times, and making up for their deficiencies in prayer.

That's not all for the Spirit. Elsewhere in the Bible, the Holy Spirit is described as the "Comforter." God's Spirit provides solace for those that labor for the Lord.

Finally, and this is what is particularly significant today, when we celebrate Pentecost, God's Spirit is depicted as the source of power and giver of ability. In today's selection from the Book of Acts, the Spirit comes dramatically, enabling the disciples to spread the Gospel of Christ, imperfect vessels through they are.

Thus it's very appropriate that we should be recognizing our graduates on Pentecost. The Pentecost message we the Church can give them is this: Follow the Spirit of truth. God's Spirit will advocate and intercede for you. God's Spirit will compensate for your inadequacies. God's Spirit will comfort you. But most of all, God's Spirit will empower you to do what is right. God's Spirit will give you tools for your journey, just as we give you this survival kit.

The symbol for the Holy Spirit is the dove, so we also give our graduates dove-shaped pins. These can be worn unobtrusively so that our graduates may remember, wherever they are, that we are with them, and that the Spirit is with them.

By the way, in case the rest of you haven't figured it out, all that I have said, about the Spirit accompanying and empowering our graduates, applies to each and every one of us. Follow the Spirit of truth. God's Spirit will advocate and intercede for us. God's Spirit will compensate for our inadequacies and comfort us. Most of all, God's Spirit will empower us to do what is right. God's Spirit gives us tools for the journey.