

Trinity's Hotshots

The Day of Pentecost
The Rev. Dr. J. Stewart Hardy

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Confirmands, when you do a homework assignment, does anyone in your family read it over? No – you just do it? You don't have a parent, maybe, having a look at it and pointing out what needs to be done and what shouldn't be said? Some of you do? You know what it's like then, Carl, when somebody reads it over and says that doesn't really work. That's what happened to me when I wrote this sermon. (And now because I've told you, I'll probably get into trouble when I get home!) But I wanted to call this sermon for you as confirmands, Trinity's Hotshots – Filled with the Spirit of God.

"The La Barranca fire . . .". Those words that caught my ear on Friday because they were talking about a fire that has broken out just outside Sedona in Arizona. Sedona is a beautiful place – I don't know if any of you have been there – wonderful red rock canyons, beautiful red rock formations, great towering evergreen forests – it's just a beautiful place. And this fire is right now, as we are gathered here, threatening Sedona. It a job for the "Arrowhead Hotshots" – a firefighting team based in California – specialists at fighting forest fires.

Now I know you're not going to believe this, but today you too become a team of specialist, a specialist team for Christ – just like the Arrowheads, just like the disciples before you. You see, the disciples were called to be a specific team; they were given very precise duties and tasks. The problem was, the person who was their leader, the person around whom they gathered, the person who told them how to get the job done, was going to die, and that meant they wouldn't have a leader. And their leader wanted them to know that, although he was gone and he would be gone forever, there was going to be something in his place. What was coming in his place was called the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, or what we call in church the Holy Spirit.

Of course, the disciples weren't quite finished, there was more they had to learn. Did you hear in the gospel lesson how they weren't done with learning? There was a lot more to be taught to them, but it wasn't going to be Jesus who would teach them, it was going to be the Holy Spirit that would lead them in new ways of understanding and thinking about how God was at work in the world. And they were going to get that Spirit from God when Jesus left.

Then if you look at the story in Acts, it tells us what happened the day the Spirit arrived, and talks about the impact it had on those disciples who were hiding out. And it tells us about how people generally reacted to what was happening. You see, it's really tempting to think that once the disciples got the Holy Spirit, that was it; they were done; they had absolutely everything they needed.

That's the same way we like to think about things like graduation or weddings or confirmation. The way we like to think is – the work's over! Classes are finished! The certificates are awarded and we're done! We tend to think about those ceremonies as sort of finishing off things, the end of the preparation we have to do. And that's true. But they mean a whole lot more than that. Graduation and weddings and confirmation are really talking about preparing us for what comes next. The reality of confirmation is that it's really just the beginning. And it's the life that you lead after you're confirmed that will either validate confirmation for what it is or deny it.

It's the same with graduation and it's the same with getting married. But with confirmation, so many people, so many think that once they've been confirmed, they've got it all: they have a perfect knowledge of scripture; they have great theological knowledge; and they have an unquestionable understanding as to what the right thing and the wrong thing is for the whole church of Christ to do because after all, they've done it and they're confirmed. And nothing could be further from the truth.

All confirmation does is give you the bare basics as to how you're going to find your way in the world. Either as a person who's related to Christ, or as someone who's forgotten Christ and is going to try their own way in a very dark world.

Confirmation, if you will, is just sort of a beginner's primer. It tells us how to get started living as a child of God and as a disciple of Christ. Now you in the white robes in front of me, are about to be confirmed. And the moment you have been, as far as God's concerned, you're like the Arrowhead Hotshots – you're on duty.

That's exactly how it is right now for the Arrowhead Hotshots. They're busy, as we sit here, fighting that fire. And that's not going to be the end of it, it's just the beginning. They're going to be firefighting all summer (it's the fire season). And they're likely not to get much sleep; they'll have no life other than fighting fires. Listen to what their website says – or better still, when you get home, Google it yourself and read about their duties – Hotshot crews are expected to accept the most difficult and hazardous tasks. A typical shift is 16 hours, and working for 32 hours without relief often happens. Firefighters often endure hot, smoky, dusty working conditions, with little sleep and poor food. Being deprived of a good night's comfortable sleep is the norm. And working with sharp tools, in the dark, on a steep hillside, under hazardous conditions which could take someone's life, is a commonplace thing for them to do.

Hotshots are frequently required to work for days at a time with only the forty pounds of equipment they carry in their fire pack. The work they perform is physically demanding, and it's emotionally taxing. They're together 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for six months. The crew eats, works, travels and rests as a unit. Under those conditions, compatibility, camaraderie, understanding, and crew pride are absolutely necessary. And it's exactly the same for all of us gathered here, to live as Christ's people – we can't do it on our own, we have to do it as a team.

Just like the Arrowhead Hotshots, the Trinity Hotshots are called – not to put out fires, but to sort of start one – to be priests in the world, to be actual people in whom and through whom Christ becomes real for other people. And that means we're on duty twenty-four hours, seven days a

week, fifty-two weeks a year – but we're not alone. We're part of a team, each one of which is sent to carry the light of Christ into the world. We're asked to be people capable of loving others, to be compassionate towards other people, to be forgiving of them, and to tell them that they are beloved of God, no matter what they've done, and that Christ is there for them just as He's been for us. And then we're given the opportunity to gather together as a team once a week around word and sacrament, where we're fed and strengthened and get a break from all the pressures of the world that wear us down.

At first thought it seems as though it's not too hazardous at all. But it's filled with dangers and risks that will wear down our faith and tear us away from what we believe is true and right in our lives if we do not gather together on the seventh day to hear God's word and to receive His sacrament. And at the same time, all of us, lest you think there's anyone here who's perfect, all of us gather here to pour out our hearts to God and to ask His forgiveness for the things we've screwed up through the week in our lives.

It's here, also, in our congregation or community of faith, that we get our in-service training, through sermons and song. But also through classes and forums and special dinner events, where we learn more and more about our faith. Maintaining our instruction in the Christian faith is essential if we're not to find ourselves living in a world with outmoded and inadequate understanding of the methods of ministry and mission that are so essential to Christian living and witness in the world. We are then commanded to take our faith and our lives into the world and use them Christ's sake so that we actually become channels of God's grace, people through whom God's grace is made available to others, living as instruments of God's love, through you, letting others sense the love of God. For it is only through us (and through no one else) in the world, that Christ can touch people's lives. If we don't do it, no one else will, and people will live their lives without the love of God.

It sounds impossible, doesn't it? And so it might be if it weren't for the power of God in the Holy Spirit actually in us. Where did you get the Holy Spirit? You got it when you were baptized. What's it like? Well, it's like buoyancy. Every human being is buoyant, and that means we do not sink automatically to the bottom of a swimming pool. You may not stay right on the surface, you may float a little under the surface, but everybody is buoyant. The only way to get to the bottom of the pool is to swim there, and believe me, staying at the bottom of a pool is mighty hard work. So everybody is buoyant, but not everybody swims, because not everybody puts their buoyancy to work.

Everybody who is baptized is filled with the Holy Spirit. But they can't possibly know the power of God working through them if they don't put it to work. If you don't reach out to others with compassion and forgiveness and understanding and love, if when you have the opportunity you can't tell others what you believe about Christ, then you'll never put the Spirit to work and it will molder in your body and just be there. So listen carefully to what happens with either Pastor Brock or I put our hands on your head, because you will hear us call upon God to stir up in you, to activate in you, the power of the Holy Spirit. Once that's done, you're going to be sent into the world, just like the Arrowhead Hotshots are sent to fight fires, for the world you see, is in desperate need of Christ, and you're the ones commissioned to take Christ into the world that so desperately needs Him. Why, we might easily call you Trinity's Hotshots – on call top Christ to

serve Him as you encounter other people, filled with God's spirit and touching them with His love and light and compassion. We really hope that will be so.

Amen.