

Fourteen years ago our Family of Faith began an educational ministry that spanned 9 years and covered thousands of miles. We explored the sites of the early church, literally seeing how this Body of Christ spread around the world. In 1996 we went to Israel and the West Bank. In 1998 we went to Greece and Turkey. In 2001 we went to Italy and Switzerland. In 2003 we went to Germany and Austria. And in 2005 we went to England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Along the way, history came alive for us. Along the way we worshipped in the actual spots that Christians have been worshipping in for hundreds of years, in some cases thousands. And I know I personally found it meaningful to stand at baptismal fonts in each of the churches we entered and to touch the water where tens of thousands had been touched by the grace of God over the centuries. These were journeys of faith that appropriately had their *beginning in Jerusalem*. Jerusalem, because that is where our Lord was crucified. Jerusalem, because that is where God raised the Christ forever changing the world. Jerusalem, because that is where God sent the promised Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost, filling and empowering the church to carry the message of Easter hope to all the world.

I hope you heard that last little bit. “God sent the promised Holy Spirit...” Because you see God is a promise keeper. This Easter season our lessons have given us multiple opportunities to be reminded that God keeps God’s promises. God promised Abram a new land, and God kept God’s promises. God promised Moses freedom, and God kept God’s promises. God promised those first disciples new life on Easter and God kept God’s promises. That is the story of faith. It is the story that touched our lives in

our baptisms as God promised us the forgiveness of our sins, a Christian community in which to worship and serve, and the gift of eternal life. Awesome promises of God; promises God kept.

And that's really the difference between us and God. God keeps promises, we don't. That's our sin. Can we say it honestly...in our sinful world, our comfort and convenience trump commitment and Christ. And that's why we get in the messes we do.

Pentecost is such a special day. It celebrates the fact that God sends the promised Holy Spirit to empower the church, to guide our individual ministries, and to constantly remind us of God's presence in our lives and in our world. Many people have said that the great miracle of faith is not Easter (but it is), but rather that that ragtag band of disciples, that gang that couldn't shoot straight, was able to spread the Gospel around the world. *Beginning in Jerusalem*, those selfish, self centered misfits became the martyrs of the church; they became the witnesses of faith; they were the evangelists of the Gospel. God's Holy Spirit made a difference in their lives. And that is why we're here today.

Marshall McLuhan, the great Canadian communicator reminded us that "The medium is the message." And so it is today as ten of our young people affirm their baptismal vows, as they confess their faith. They are here today because of promises God made to them 14 years ago. They are here today because of promises their parents and sponsors made 14 years ago. They are here today because of promises this Family of Faith has made through the years. And today they stand as adults and make the commitments of faith: To live among God's faithful people; to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's Supper; to proclaim the Good News of Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of

Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. And it all began in Jerusalem.

We thank God for the work of the Spirit in this Family of Faith.

A Spirit which fills our worship with grace and Easter Resurrection hope;

A Spirit which empowers our ministry as we work for justice and struggle for peace;

A Spirit that moves the faithful to commitment and Christ and away from their comfort and convenience;

A Spirit which constantly comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable;

A Spirit which gathers the church, to be the Body of Christ.

For all the Saints...the people of God...*beginning in Jerusalem.*