

John 14:15-17, 25-27

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Let us continue our worship together in prayer: Nurturing Lord, open our ears to what you would have us hear and our eyes to the new things you are doing in our midst, so that we might see you at work in and through us. If these words are not your Word, may they be forgotten and come to naught, but if they be Thy Word, may they adhere to our hearts, forever transforming us from glory into glory, into the creatures you would have us be, though who art our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

ACTS 2:1-4 (NRSV)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The Word of the Lord...

I recently spent time with a friend of mine who told me a wonderful story about his 5 year old daughter, Kristen (not her real name). Kristen is a sweet little girl who also journeys through this life with Asperger's syndrome. There are many of you who journey with this as well – either your own or someone you love's.

In Kristen her struggles manifest itself as she processes what is going on around her which can make it difficult for her to socialize with her peers. It is because of her challenges in being social that my friends work extra hard to give her encouragement and keep her self-esteem in a healthy place. There are many of you traveling this same path.

My friend told me Kristen had come into the house quite triumphantly one morning and said, "Daddy, I peed outside."

As any parent of children in the younger age bracket does he immediately concerned himself with clean up and realizing there was none said, "But honey, your pants aren't wet."

"I know. I pulled my pants down by the tree like the boys do."

My friend said that all kinds of thoughts jammed in his head: he knew he needed to tell her that although unfair, boys can pee outside, and girls really shouldn't but he didn't want to get into a gender conversation nor was he sure that it was appropriate for any boys or girls to be peeing outside his home and he also wanted to be sensitive to her self esteem...

All of these thoughts in a split second were going through his head and as **he** was struggling to process she said, "I'M AWESOME!" And marched back out the door.

As I laughed with him, we both enjoyed the fact that at least for now, self-esteem is not an issue. Thanks be to God.

My friend attributes his daughter's confidence largely to the church they attend. Both of his daughters have been loved there since the moment they walked through the door. Kristen was baptized there and was carried around much like we do here, symbolically handing her to members of the congregation, the same ones who only moments earlier had promised to "guide her by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her to know and follow Christ and be a faithful member of the Church."

Today we celebrate the Confirmation Class, a group of 8th graders who after a year of study, prayer and discernment have decided that they want to confirm the vows made at their baptisms on their behalf. In the next service/just a moment we will ask them the same questions that were asked on that day and will rejoice in their commitment to make this faith in Christ their own.

It is my prayer and hope that the confidence they have in the love that Christ has for them and that this church has for them, might carry them through the rest of life's journey – and all of its ups and downs. And so in honor of Kristen I offer them and us these three charges of Awesome-ness.

May you always be able to look into the mirror and say, "I'm awesome!"

As some of you may have noted, it has been a long time since I struggled with my own self esteem. My secret is the confidence I have stems from the verse inscribed on many of our hearts, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me¹."

As confident as I am in Christ's love for me now, I have not always been this way. There were many, many years where there was no way I was even going to take a good look at myself in the mirror, let alone try to eek out the words, "I'm awesome!" I've been told even the popular kids take a walk through the awkward pre-teen and teen years (and for some of us, 20's and 30's) although I'm not sure all of them had a father who would pronounce loudly at the dinner table, "What is that big red thing on your nose? Is that a ZIT?" (thanks, Dad.)

Decidedly, not awesome.

Every Sunday I call us to worship with the same words, "Beloved children of God, let us worship the Lord." This is not just an empty turn of a phrase, we are beloved children of God, *fearfully and wonderfully made*. It is God's desire for us to be so pleased with who we are in Him that we are able to look into the mirror and say, "I'm awesome!"

Because even at the moment where we are farthest away from believing it? God knows it to be true.

My second charge is this:

May you always be able to participate in the life of the church and say, "We're awesome!"

The passage from Acts today speaks specifically of the Holy Spirit's presence in the midst of a gathered congregation. Although there are no tongues of fire in our midst, the Spirit's presence is certainly palpable. As someone said in Thursday's Bible Study in reference to last week's sermon, our congregation appears to be far from flatlining.

Just as a commitment is made by each of us to guide those who are baptized in the Christian faith "by word and deed, with love and prayer" we also make a commitment when we become members of the church to "be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and ministry through our prayers and gifts, our study and service and so fulfill our calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ."

Simply put, a church is only as awesome as its many members and their commitment to the ministry of the church.

We build strength and confidence through study and prayer.

We build confidence and community through fellowship and service events.

We build community and hope in the Lord through mission and worship opportunities.

It is through all of these touchstones that we establish a community of faith that is small enough to know one another and large enough to serve with one another. It is crucial that each and every one of us participates in Word and in deed, in prayer and in service so that even just a quick glance around will evoke the spirited response, "We're awesome!"

Which leads me to our third charge of awesomeness:

May you always be in relationship with our Lord and Savior and be able to say, "God's awesome!"

The Gospel of John declares that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach us everything and will remind us of God's presence and teachings that guide us on God's path. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

And for many of us, we pray to God that this is true. Because this world is hard.

This world can feel like we'll never get a break.

This world has earthquakes and illness and tragedy and brokenness.

I do not give to you as the world gives...
Great Lord.

Thank you, Lord.

Where are you Lord?

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.
I knew The Lord was going to say that.

Our God is awesome and God's plan for you and me is sure. When we lean on the everlasting arms and let the Spirit take control there is nothing that can stand in God's way. But we must trust in the Spirit.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.
We must not be swayed from what we know to be True.
We must not let the whispers of doubt or demons get in our way.
We must not be moved from God's chosen path.

God who created us,
Jesus who redeems us,
The Spirit who abides in us – these three in one are no fluke.

They are power. And light.
They are service. And strength.
They are promise. And love.
They are joy . And hope.

In short, they are Awesome!
And we, beloved children of God.... are charged to be the same.

Let us Pray... *You, O God, are an awesome God, who sends forth as the Holy Spirit. You come to all, women, men, young, old, to all colors, all people. God who speaks all languages and loves all people and accepts all. We rejoice with you this day! It is in your name and love for us that we pray for strength and wisdom, for confidence in who you have created us and your church to be. May we strive to give you thanks and proclaim your peace. Amen.*

¹ *Philippians 4:13*