

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt  
Fourth Presbyterian Church  
May 20, 2018  
Day of Pentecost

### **The One Who Accompanies Us**

Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Every year on the Day of Pentecost  
we tell the story of of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples in Jerusalem,  
what we like to call the birthday of the church.

But Pentecost is not just a history lesson.

It is not just a remembrance of something that happened in the past.  
Pentecost is a day to claim the power that is still available  
and keeping the church alive today.

But what is this power that came

like the rush of a mighty wind through the community of disciples,  
and like tongues of fire that lighted upon each individual disciple?

And if it is more than just a history lesson,  
how do we access this power today?  
How do we experience it?

Ever since we human beings learned to make our own fire  
energy has been something to be harnessed,  
power has been something we have used to achieve our own goals.

But the power and energy of Pentecost is not this sort of power and energy.

We cannot harness it, or even use it.

The Holy Spirit is, rather, a Power in which we may participate,  
by letting the Power move us, guide us, work upon us,  
and perhaps most of all, show us — that is, illumine us, teach us,  
or as Jesus says in the Gospel of John,  
*guide us into all the truth.*

---

In the gospel of John today,  
Jesus has been breaking the disciples hearts.

We have dipped into the middle of his Farewell Discourse  
in which he prepares his disciples for what is coming.

He is going away, leaving this world, returning to the Father,  
and his friends are grieving deeply at the thought of losing him.

What Jesus tells them is that although they will not see him any longer,  
he is not actually abandoning them —

he will still be with them through the Spirit he is sending them.

Only, he gives the Spirit a new name in the Farewell Discourse.

The Paraclete, *paracletos* in the Greek,  
which is translated here as *the Advocate*.

*Paracletos* is a tough word to translate and has be rendered in many ways,  
as Advocate, Comforter, Helper, Intercessor, Aider, Teacher, Guider.

Literally, the word means, *One who is called alongside you.*

The Paraclete is the One Who Accompanies the disciples after Jesus is gone,  
as Jesus accompanied the disciples while he was here on earth.

In fact, it is interesting that earlier in the Discourse,  
Jesus tells his disciples that the Father will send *another* Advocate,  
Jesus was the first one *called alongside* the disciples.  
Now comes the Spirit, *called alongside* the disciples  
to do what Jesus had been doing in the flesh.

It is not just for his disciples' sake that Jesus sends the Spirit,  
not just because they are grieving,  
not just to be their Comforter in the sorrow of losing him.  
It is for the sake of the world that Jesus sends the Spirit,  
because even though Jesus is soon to leave the world bodily,  
his work is far from complete, and his work must continue  
through this community of his friends.

They will now become his flesh in the world,  
animated by the same Spirit that animated him,  
guided into the same Truth that Jesus taught them.

*When the Spirit of truth comes, Jesus says,  
he will guide you into all the truth;  
for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears,  
and he will declare to you the things that are to come.*

---

Now it would be easy for us to feel that we, as disciples these days,  
have gotten the short end of the stick.

We may be skeptical of Jesus' assurance of the disciples.

He says to them,

*...it is to your advantage that I go away,  
for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you;  
but if I go, I will send him to you.*

We may not be quite convinced.

How could it possibly be better for Jesus to go away?

How could it be to the advantage of his friends then,

and to our advantage today, not to have Jesus in the world, in the flesh?

Well, maybe, because

in the work that God sent Jesus to do,  
two are better than one, and three are better than two,  
and a whole community is better than just two or three.

Jesus as Advocate is just one body on earth.

But when the other Advocate comes,  
every disciple becomes the presence of Jesus in the world.

Then there were suddenly hundreds of Jesus in the world.

And today, how many of Jesus might there be?

The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, comes alongside and accompanies a whole host of bodies,  
binding them together as one body — that is, binding us together  
as the one body of Jesus in the world.

---

But what do we really mean by all this talk of Spirit.  
Bodies we get. We can see them, feed them, dissect them, study them,  
even fix them when they are broken,  
and we're getting better at doing that all the time.  
We understand physical life, bodily life.  
But what is spiritual life? What are we even talking about here?

One thing that is clear from Jesus' teaching is that so much of the truth about human life  
has to do with human relationships.  
Indeed, it may be our capacity for relationship —  
with one another and ultimately with God —  
that makes us truly human.  
This is why the most important thing Jesus teaches us in the Gospel of John  
is *that you love one another*.

In fact,  
"John is distinguished from the other Gospels by an almost total lack of ethical exhortation.  
Nowhere in John are disciples encouraged to turn the other cheek,  
walk the other mile, forgive those who trespass against them,  
give away possessions, or attend to the poor. [Nowhere!]  
Only in the farewell conversation does a 'commandment' appear,  
surfacing early and echoing throughout the discourse."<sup>1</sup>

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.  
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

"It is as close as we get to an ethical injunction in John.  
Mutual love is at the heart of John's vision of the Christian life.

Indeed, it is the identifying characteristic of the community  
that continues to exist in the world in Jesus' name.  
Such love keeps the spirit of Jesus alive in the world...  
for as long as Christian love is in the world,  
the world is still encountering Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Human relationships — and more importantly, love in human relationships —  
this is where the Spirit is at work,  
this is where we will find the power of the One Who Accompanies Us now.

---

So what does this look like today?  
How is the Holy Spirit at work today?  
How is Jesus present — even incarnate — in the world today?

Well, there are some obvious things that we might point to.  
This morning, we are commissioning two youth mission teams  
to go and demonstrate the love of Jesus to others.  
Here we have upwards of 50 flesh and blood bodies  
who are going in Jesus' name,  
going to carry on his work of loving the world  
by attending to the suffering of the world,  
and in doing so  
to become the very presence of Jesus for those they serve,  
to become the body of Christ for them.  
This is, to be sure, the work of the Holy Spirit today.

But there may be some less obvious ways we make Jesus present today.  
Like paying attention to the suffering of those around us  
right here in Greenville.  
It's one thing to serve the needs of others,  
when it includes the exciting experience of seeing a city like San Francisco,  
or New Orleans, or a Caribbean island like the Dominican Republic.  
It is perhaps an even more profound thing  
to invest your time and energy into making a difference right here at home  
where we live our ordinary lives,  
like when we host homeless families in our church,  
and there is a call to stay overnight as the church host,  
or to make a meal, or to set up or take down the bedrooms.  
Just something for us to ponder  
while we are serving people on the other side of the continent.  
What about the people who are in need back home in Greenville?  
Is the Spirit guiding us to make Jesus real to them, too?

Another hint of how the Holy Spirit might be at work today  
comes to us in the story of Pentecost in Acts.  
These *devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem*  
were members of the Jewish diaspora, or the dispersion —  
those Jews who were dispersed all around Asia Minor,  
displaced by the political realities of their day.  
These Jews had learned to speak the primary language of their various cities and cultures.  
But when the Spirit comes,  
the disciples begin to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in all of these languages.  
It is a key thing to note  
that there was not a single Christian mono-culture presented here,  
but the Christian gospel was translated into many languages.

So perhaps the power of the Holy Spirit is experienced today  
when people from all different cultures, different tribes — even competing ideologies —  
are able to hear the gospel and respond to Jesus and recognize that,  
while they are hearing the good news in their own language,  
they are bound together  
with all the others who are also responding to that good news,  
in their own languages.

And surely, the Spirit is experienced today when we struggle with our faith,  
and when we struggle to know how to pray as we ought,  
or struggle even to pray at all,  
when we look around at the world God has made and want to throw up our hands;  
when we hear and feel the *creation groaning in labor pains*,  
and we groan with it, inwardly, waiting for the redemption of our bodies.  
It is in these times when we must rely on the Spirit to pray for us,  
to pray within us, with sighs too deep for words,  
and to give us a hope that goes beyond what we can see,  
so that we may wait patiently for God's redemption of the world.

It is in these moments of love —  
joyous love and suffering love,  
love that is willing to lay down one's life for a friend,  
or perhaps for a stranger —  
all in the hope that God will vindicate Jesus  
and bring the world  
to the perfection of love that God the Father intends for us all.

It is in our joining the work of Jesus toward this vision,  
that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Teacher,  
is at work in the world today.

It is not our work...  
...but the work of the One Who Accompanies Us,  
that we celebrate...  
on this Day of Pentecost in the year 2018.

So let us come together, and be sent together...  
...so that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord...*  
...*shall be saved.*

<sup>1</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Encounters with Jesus: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 107.

<sup>2</sup> Gench, 107