

Sermon Feast of Pentecost 2018 Year B
Last Sunday at St. John's
Acts 21-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37b
Romans 8:22-27
John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15
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May 20, 2018

We have been journeying towards this day for quite some time. At last this Sunday has arrived, complete with baptisms, Choral Evensong, and our much anticipated Pentecost picnic. Today is the 50th day after Easter, the Feast of Pentecost as we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the presence of God with us at all times. (8:00 am: I am glad that our sanctuary is not equipped with a screen and AV equipment for fear that you would be clamoring to experience the royal wedding sermon by Michael Curry once again.)

We heard the dramatic story of the arrival of the Holy Spirit as people of faith from many nations gathered in pilgrimage and worship in Jerusalem. The Spirit's arrival was heralded by the rush of a loud mighty wind. And, as we have come to know such wind can attract a lot of attention. That wasn't enough, of course, so tongues of fire alighted on the disciples as well. And with the fire came power, the great manifestation of the Spirit's power through the work of love and connection. Suddenly, people from different origins, backgrounds, and nations were in relationship, speaking and understanding one another. The disciples shared the love of God as they had come to know that love made present in Jesus.

That is one dramatic story. Yet, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, has been present from the very beginning. As part of the intertwined life of God, this aspect of the divine life has been present from before creation. As such, the Spirit has been a part of everything that has been created, everything and every person. The Psalmists acknowledge the Spirit's work in Psalm 139 with phrases such as: "You knit me together in my mother's womb. You knit together my inmost parts." "LORD, you have searched me out and known me; * you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 2 You trace

my journeys and my resting- places * and are acquainted with all my ways. 3

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, * but you, O LORD, know it altogether. (Psalm 139) So, the Spirit has been with each of us from our very beginning.

This Sunday is one of the four Sunday's over the course of the year that is especially appropriate for baptisms. Today we have 3 candidates for baptism. The youngest is Libby, the daughter of Elizabeth and John Carrington. Libby is joined by two children who are a little older, Victoria Jones who has an older sister Taylor. And Nicholas who has an older sister Parisa. Nicholas is probably the most familiar with the sacrament of baptism having watched his father and sister being baptized here last Easter.

We speak of Baptism as a sacrament. Sacraments are at the core of our faith. They are as one theologian described them, "the sharp points of God's love." These are the points where the divine love and human life make special connection. Divine love is transmitted and passed on. Kim Glenn and I will pour water over these children's heads and say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." That is the outward sign but the important action is the work that God is doing. Invisibly and mysteriously the Holy Spirit is being made present in them in new and more powerful ways. Through the waters of baptism, these children are changed and marked as Christ's own forever. They become part of the mystical body of Christ. And nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Baptisms may look rather straightforward and yet at the same time they are filled with mystery.

These three children will never be the same again. The Spirit has always been present as the psalmist assured us. But once sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are held even more closely in God's embrace.

The Spirit then not only embraces us but at the same time propels us forward, as the Spirit propelled the disciples forward from that day onward. The disciples had a choice of course, just as we all face choices in our lives. The disciples could have chosen to return to fishing or any of their other vocations

before Jesus called them. But instead the Spirit empowered them, as the Spirit is always doing, to take the message to others. Tell the story, go to distant lands, risk their very lives. The Spirit propels us into relationship. The Spirit of God is known to each of us because this is the very animating power that we know as love.

Jesus as we heard in our gospel lessons during this Easter season promised that after his Ascension, the disciples would not be abandoned. Rather Jesus would send an Advocate, the Comforter and guide to accompany them always.

What does Jesus promise? Jesus promises that this Spirit of God will accompany them always and lead them. This Spirit will make possible the abundant life that God desires for all people. And this abundant life will be marked with joy. And today, we heard that the Gift of the Spirit, will lead us into all truth.

Today, our culture has a pretty fuzzy picture of truth. We have an uneasy relationship with facts and honesty. But that is not God's hope for us. Relationships based on love can only be grounded in truth. Fortunately, Jesus assured us that the Spirit is working, leading us into truth. Leading us into relationships that are open, loving, trusting, honest and yes even risky. That is God's hope for us.

And there is even more. Jesus said that he had more to reveal to his disciples but they simply couldn't bear that truth at that point. So, one of the primary roles of the Spirit is to lead us into this truth that Jesus has to reveal in our lives, in our world.

The church is fond of saying that we are a post-resurrection people. Today, I want to accent the fact that perhaps more importantly, we are a post- Pentecost people. The Spirit is the ongoing divine presence in our lives that has been with us always. And most importantly will accompany us always. As the psalmist asks, "where can I go from your presence?" The answer is no where, the Spirit is wrapped around us in love and will never leave us. The Spirit undergirds every aspect of our lives. The Spirit is as close as our breath. And is present every

minute of every day, working in you and through you. Your lives are intertwined with the life of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

During the time that I have had the good fortune to be your rector, I have seen and felt the Spirit's presence in our lives quite often. Because, of course, the Spirit has been leading St. John's all along. The Spirit has been present long before I arrived and will continue to be present. I experienced that presence most palpably as we gathered to discern who God was calling to serve on Vestry. At other times, I felt the Spirit's presence when new initiatives were being discerned, such as the tutoring program at Linkhorne Elementary, or the development of the Backpacks program. Times of baptismal, confirmation, pre-marital preparation are especially fertile ground for connection with the Spirit's presence. As is, sensing the Spirit's presence surrounding births of children. The Spirit surrounds the most poignant times and especially when we are fortunate to experience the Spirit during the time surrounding the death of our friends or loved ones. The Spirit simply pervades every aspect of our life together in this parish.

When I accepted the call to become your rector, your former senior warden, David Shields, sent me a note of welcome. In his note he said that one thing had become apparent to him through the transition process. That is, he had learned to trust the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. That is a powerful lesson.

Today is an important day as we celebrate the ongoing presence of the Spirit of God among us, as we celebrate the baptism of Libby, Victoria, and Nicholas, and as we mark a transition as you move to new leadership and I move into retirement.

As we make this transition, I want you to know that my love for you will continue, and while I won't be present, the Spirit will be present. The Holy Spirit will continue to sustain and support you as the Spirit guides you into all truth, the future that God is holding before you. That is something that you can count and depend upon.

I care deeply for you and always will. And as a dear friend of mine reminded me one day, "For Christians, no goodbye is forever." (The Rev. Christopher Mwawa, Zomba, Malawi, July 2012.)