

Day of Pentecost

May 20, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John. (John 15: 26-27, 16: 4b-15)

[Jesus said,] “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is Pentecost! And we’ve got this red thing going. And we’ve got this windy, fire-ish thing happening up here. There is a little bit of energy here, even at eight in the morning. So, are you ready to invite the Holy Spirit into this place?

If you’re going to invite the Holy Spirit in, you need to work a little on posture. But first you need to shake off the, “I can’t move in church.” Go ahead. Shake it off. You have to shake off the “I am too Scandinavian,” or “I am an introvert.” And let your body find a prayer posture that is open to the Holy Spirit. It might just be simple open hand. You might want to channel your inner Pentecostal. You might want to be liturgical about it. Let your body teach, and find that space. Maybe you’re at a place in your life where you can only open up just a little bit. But let your body find a posture that invites the Holy Spirit.

The one thing you can't do is this (closed fist). And I'll warn you, by the end of the sermon, you're going to be wanting to be doing this (closed fist, crossed arms). But, for now, let's open to the Spirit.

Please pray with me, repeating: "Come Holy Spirit."

RESPONSE: "Come Holy Spirit."

"We are waiting for you."

RESPONSE: "We are waiting for you."

"Amen. Let it be so."

RESPONSE: "Amen. Let it be so."

We often talk about Pentecost like it's the very beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit comes at Pentecost." But that's not right. The Spirit has been around for forever.

In that wonderful rendering of the creation in Genesis 1, we read:

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit swept over the face of the waters."

The Spirit was there in the beginning, over the chaos, pure potential, waiting to create.

In the Old Testament over and over we hear: "*The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.*" "*The Spirit of God stirred in her.*" "*The Spirit of God clothed him.*" Strength, creativity, abilities. The Spirit brings what is needed when it is needed, all through history.

Ezekiel the prophet has a vision of a valley of dry bones. Remember that story? Looking out over the dry, bleached, dead bones. And Ezekiel calls out:

"Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act."

From the very beginning, the Holy Spirit has been bringing new life. The Holy Spirit has been shaping God's people and future.

So please pray with me.

“Come Holy Spirit, and fill us.”

RESPONSE: “Come Holy Spirit, and fill us.”

“Come Holy Spirit, and give us life.”

RESPONSE: “Come Holy Spirit, and give us life.”

“Amen. Let it be so.”

RESPONSE: “Amen. Let it be so.”

And then there is Pentecost. In that upper room there is wind and there is fire, and the Holy Spirit comes and fills everybody there. And what do they do? They go out. Out – There. Now, be clear about this. There was no instruction manual for going out. There was no training session on how to go out. There were no ten steps for those considering going out. They just go. They go and tell what they know. And everybody understands what they are saying. But that’s not the miracle. The miracle is not that the crowds understand. The miracle is that they understand in their own languages.

Can you imagine hearing this good news of love and a future, spoken in a way that you can understand? The disciples did not say, “You all come in and become like us, and then we’ll give you the good news.” “Come in, and once you understand us real well, we’ll tell you about Jesus.” No. The disciples go out and they speak other languages.

People don’t have to come in here to hear the good news. We can go out and speak other languages. Maybe we’ll speak in Spanish or in Somali. But more likely we will speak parents of five year old. Anybody know parents of a five year old? Or maybe it’s teenager. Are you guys fluent in teenager? Maybe it’s cancer survivor. Or maybe you speak “going to the gym.” Or “spending a lot of hours at work,” or “retired.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can translate the good news of Jesus Christ into the languages of our culture out there.

Please pray with me.

“Come Holy Spirit, we’re willing to go out.”

RESPONSE: “Come Holy Spirit, we’re willing to go out.”

“Come Holy Spirit, give us courage,”

RESPONSE: “Come Holy Spirit, give us courage,”

“and words to speak.”

RESPONSE: “and words to speak.”

“Amen. Let it be so.

RESPONSE: “Amen. Let it be so.”

The disciples went out into the streets, and people understood them, which was very cool. But I don't think the point of it was to get attention, or to do this really cool thing. I think the Spirit was creating something that day. The Spirit was building something within that crowd. Peter names it, when he quotes Joel.

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young ones shall see visions, and your old ones shall dream dreams.”

This miracle out there of speaking and understanding was building a vision. A vision of what God can do, of what God is creating in this world. A vision to shape us all into something new. And don't we need a vision of newness right now?

This week there was another school shooting. I don't know about you, but all I could think of was – this is a mess, and it's hard, and it's too slow. Then last night I get a phone call that our sound system has disappeared. And all I could think of was, “Really?”

There is a tendency to get into the midst of death, and pain, and crisis, and loss; and in turn want vengeance or somebody to blame. We want to get small and protect ourselves, and stay in our upper rooms and lock the doors, and arm ourselves, and not let anybody in. There is a tendency to want to look at everybody with suspicion.

But we are people of the Holy Spirit, and our young see visions, and our elders dream dreams. And we have a vision of a good future. We have a vision of love and connection. A vision of a world where young people are not so isolated that they have to kill to be noticed. Instead they are surrounded by community. We have a vision of a world where young people see and accept each other because they've seen that modeled in their elders. We have the vision of a world where sharing and hospitality are more important than wealth and possession. We have the vision of a world where “Love your Neighbor” isn't just a bumper sticker or a lawn sign. It's a way of life.

We have this vision because Jesus Christ laid out this vision in the Sermon on the Mount. He modeled this vision in healing and eating and walking alongside others. He died and rose again to release power in this world to make the vision a reality. We can claim this vision as our own and live it out with all we've got. And we can invite the Spirit to work out this vision through us.

Please pray with me.

“Come Holy Spirit and fill us –

RESPONSE: “Come Holy Spirit and fill us –

“with a vision of what could be.

RESPONSE: “with a vision of what could be.”

“Come Holy Spirit, stir in us”

RESPONSE: Come Holy Spirit, stir in us

“the will for something new.”

RESPONSE: “the will for something new.”

Amen. Let it be so.

RESPONSE: Amen. Let it be so.

That day Peter spoke. He continued in his speech through most of the 2nd Chapter of Acts. And when he finished talking, three thousand people came to be baptized. They caught the vision. They were open to the Spirit and this new life, this new world. And they all lived happily ever after.

Not quite. When the Spirit started working, it got messy, and it got hard and dangerous. The disciples were later imprisoned, and beaten, and chased out of town. And all but one of them died violently. The other one died in exile. There is a cost to inviting the Holy Spirit in. There will be pushbacks, and doubts, and a lot of hard work, and some failures along the way.

Martin Luther knew that. Luther described seven marks of the church. He said you know it’s the true church if you see these seven things happening in the church. Things like baptism, and forgiveness, and preaching the Word. The seventh mark of the church is suffering. He said,

“They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh. Wherever you see or hear this, you may know that the Holy Christian Church is there.”¹

¹ Martin Luther, “On the Councils and the Church” (1539), Luther’s Works, Vol. 41, Church and Ministry III.

Remember, I said you might want to be doing this by the end (closed fist) by the end? When the Spirit fills us, things get messy and they get hard. When the Spirit calls us into love, it can be just plain hard. When the Spirit works in us, we are changed, and we see the world differently, and we interact differently. We find something bigger and more hopeful out there that we want to be a part of. And we're willing to open ourselves up to service for that bigger vision. Sometimes it's uncomfortable. Sometimes it's awkward. Sometimes it takes us in directions we haven't imagined. It's what a friend of mine calls, "The Holy Spirit messing with us."

The Spirit can renew this world, if we are open to where the Spirit leads us, into love and connection.

So now, if you're still willing, pray with me once.

"Come Holy Spirit and mess with me."

RESPONSE: "Come Holy Spirit and mess with me."

"Come Holy Spirit, use me as you will."

RESPONSE: "Come Holy Spirit, use me as you will."

"Come Holy Spirit, I am yours."

RESPONSE: "Come Holy Spirit, I am yours."

"Amen. Let it be so."

RESPONSE: "Amen. Let it be so."