



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“The Holy Spirit in & outside the Church”

Day of Pentecost

May 28, 2023

Acts of the Apostles 2:1-20

A Homily by the Rev'd Jo P. Popham

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came as Jesus had promised. It was more exciting and dramatic than any of Jesus's followers could have imagined. They had been waiting – confident in Jesus's promise spoken at his Ascension just ten days before: “I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”¹ Jesus had filled their lives with such meaning. They were bewildered and filled with deep sorrow at his death. They longed for his return to them. They were filled with astonishment yet great joy when he was raised from the dead. They were encouraged by his appearing to them. Through his teachings they had come to understand of the prophecies of the Spirit, but it was through his resurrection that they came to believe with their whole hearts. They trusted that Jesus would not leave them orphaned.² They had complete confidence that Jesus would fulfill his pledge to send the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate forever.³ And so they waited, in faithful expectation. Likely they were praying, silently praying. They dozed and awoke and prayed some more to be renewed by that Spirit. And then their senses were awakened. They heard the roaring noise and felt the stinging of a powerful wind. They experienced the Holy Spirit as a “rush of violent wind.” It was all encompassing because it “filled the entire house.”⁴ And they saw the Holy Spirit as fire, as divided tongues of fire.⁵ In their happiness and excitement they spilled out into the streets. And they drew a crowd. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in languages that no one else in the street understood, but they were able to understand one another.⁶

But lest we think that the Holy Spirit came into being on the 50th day after Jesus rose from the dead, think again. No, God, the triune God, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed together eternally from the beginning of time. Acts of the Apostles has been called the Gospel according to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit spoke in the Book of

David.⁷ The Spirit spoke through Isaiah.⁸ There are more than 40 references to the action of the Holy Spirit. From its inception, the early Church was Spirit-filled; the source of its power was the Holy Spirit.

From the moment described in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early Church. As a source of guidance, the Holy Spirit was very active in the lives of the 1st century leaders affording them the power and the courage to accomplish tasks on behalf of the Church.⁹

But what of the actions of the Holy Spirit today? Our Episcopal tradition is steeped in the Holy Spirit. Our catechism – the outline of our faith tells us about the person of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Yes, we can experience the Holy Spirit at the Lord's Table, at confirmation and marriage, when we are forgiven, and through all the sacraments and yet – at any time at any moment. The Holy Spirit can descend on us like a dove. She can be as gentle as a breath or she can be like a violent wind. She is a moving engaging entity that can empower our faith individually but also that can tie together those of good faith to God the Father and God the Son, Jesus the Christ. And the Holy Spirit can renew us again and again and make us recall the one who created us and recreates us day after day, hour after hour and turn our hearts to Jesus again and again. And, yes, we do know the Holy Spirit through experience in the Church.

But if I may be so bold, shouldn't we concentrate more on what the Holy Spirit empowers us to do rather than on celebrating the birthday of the Church? As an institution, the Church actually can be handicapped by our focus on the stained glass in the Narthex, or the color of the pews, and the handiwork of the altar linens, or the right colors of the priests' vestments, even where we sit in our favorite pew each Sunday, or how reverently we say the words of the Great Thanksgiving, and even how we sing the service music (Is the corporal facing the right way on the fair linen? Do we sing the Fraction Anthem "Alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" before or after the break the bread?). Could those things give us the power to spread the Gospel to all people as we so often affirm? I must remind us of our Baptismal promises as I often do. I will

ask again today, “Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?” And we dutifully will answer: “I will with God’s help.” My sisters and brothers, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that allows to answer with confidence that we will with God’s help. With God’s help we will witness to Jesus’s work through the work of the Holy Spirit. We will with God’s help become missionaries in our world to take God’s love to the people in our homes, in our workplaces, the people at the Blue Door and the Bike Shop, in the streets of Destin, on our beaches, and throughout the world. We can come to the defense of people in distress as an advocate, but we can also stand by their side – and “have their back.”¹¹

Really, shouldn’t Pentecost be more about the Good News of the Gospel being spread outside of the church walls? Isn’t the story of Pentecost more about an active Holy Spirit inspiring entity who gets us out of our seats and sends us out, who empowers us with gifts for the journey? The Holy Spirit gets us going to be Christ Jesus to the world – to be Jesus to the people inside and outside of this church.

Jim and I have had the privilege of hearing Presiding Bishop Curry preach in person – several times. And, yes, he is filled with the Holy Spirit. Michael Curry often refers to the Church as the “Jesus Movement.” He has expressed the truth in saying that we in the Episcopal Church are part of the Jesus Movement. He believes that our church is “growing more deeply in the spirit of God, in the movement of God’s spirit in the world. It is that way in Pentecost, people whose lives are really living in the spirit of God’s love find themselves growing more in the direction of God’s dream.”¹² It is the spirit that can make us like Jesus – that can make us active in the Jesus Movement. When people hear of our church – the way we love one another, maybe we are being like Jesus.¹³

Bishop Curry tells of a story of two little boys eating ice cream on a warm summer day. The older had served their bowls, and he took a larger portion. The younger child wanted more – he wanted his share. The mother came in and asked what they were arguing about. She said: “Now children, we know that we are Christians, and we are followers of Jesus, and we are supposed to live like Jesus. Now what would Jesus do?”

The older boy said, “I know what Jesus would do, Mama.” As soon as Mom was out of the room, the older one said to the younger: “Okay, today you be Jesus.”

My sisters and brothers, it is through the Holy Spirit that we come to know and knowing come to value one another as children of God. It is through the Holy Spirit that we can identify with and then empathize with others so that we can allow God to live and act through us – notwithstanding the older boy in his story behaving very human. The Holy Spirit has the power to restore the world and humanity. God is reordering the world, my friends. The act of creating continues. God is recreating all the time through the work of the Holy Spirit working through us. It is up to us to be the active part of that recreating.

The Holy Spirit is not only active in the life and work of the Church. She is not just inspiring the work that goes on inside these walls, but what happens outside of them.

Risen Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ See Luke 24:49.

² See John 14:18.

³ See Acts 14:16.

⁴ See Acts 2:2:2.

⁵ See Acts 2:3.

⁶ See Acts 2:4, 6-11.

⁷ See Acts 1:16: Holy Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit did through David by foretelling Judas’s role in the arrest of Jesus.

⁸ See Acts 28:25: In the midst of a disagreement, Paul said: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah...

⁹ The Holy Spirit guidance is recorded through Acts:

- moving Philip to go to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:29),
- preparing Peter for Cornelius’s people (Acts 10:19),
- ordering Peter to not hesitate to go to those emissaries (Acts 11:12),
- enabling Agabus to foretell the coming famine (Acts 11:28),
- ordering Paul and Barnabas to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2 and 4),
- guiding decisions of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:28),
- guiding Paul past Asia, Mysia and Bithynia, down into Troas and then to Europe (Acts 16:6),
- telling Paul what awaits him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23).
- enabling Peter to be eloquent before the Sanhedrin ([Acts 4:31](#)), and

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- empowering Paul in the conquest of Elymas ([Acts 13:9](#)).
 - Etc., etc., etc.

¹⁰ From the Book of Common Prayer, ECUSA, Church Publishing Company, NYC, pp. 852-3.

Q. Who is the Holy Spirit?

A. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church even now.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the Old Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Covenant as the giver of life, the One who spoke through the prophets.

Q. How is the Holy Spirit revealed in the New Covenant?

A. The Holy Spirit is revealed as the Lord who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ.

Q. How do we recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

A. We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit?

A. We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

¹¹ In Greek the word for the Holy Spirit is *paraklete* derived from a word meaning to “call to one’s side” that corresponds to the Latin *advocatus*. But there is a subtle difference in the Roman advocate and the Hellenistic *paraklete*. In a Roman court an advocate would plead a case, but in a Greek court people had to plead their own cases, and they would bring along a friend as *paraklete* to influence the court. A *paraklete* would be in court to be of moral support but also to testify to the value of the person as a citizen – a character witness, of sorts, to testify – to bear witness.

¹² Diocese of Missouri. <https://www.diocesemo.org/about/episcopal-church/rt-rev-michael-bruce-curry-presiding-bishop-elect>.

¹³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQrfe12AODs>, Christ Church Cathedral in Lexington, Kentucky, Pentecost Sunday, May 15, 2016.