

Today we celebrate Pentecost and the arrival of the Holy Spirit as recounted in the book of Acts but John's gospel offers a different perspective. In the gospel of John the Holy Spirit arrives with the Easter resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples. This week we hear Jesus introduce his disciples to the Holy Spirit, the Advocate who will come to them after he is gone.

If last week's gospel was told from the perspective of the parent letting go this week is told from the perspective of the parent who is trying to launch a child who is not eager to leave the nest. The disciples are anxious and scared about what they are hearing and they are not sure what he really means. Basically Jesus is telling them that the time has come for them to step up and step out and that they will be equipped and supported by the Holy Spirit.

But who is the Holy Spirit? Although the Holy Spirit doesn't become fully present in an ongoing way until after Pentecost the Spirit of the Lord is active through the Old Testament, giving breath and life to all creatures, speaking to and empowering the judges and the prophets of Israel, particularly in defense of those who are vulnerable.

We see the Holy Spirit active throughout Jesus' mission and ministry. Whenever we say the Nicene Creed we remember that Jesus became incarnate and was made man through the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was present at his baptism and then drove him into the wilderness. The Holy Spirit gives Jesus the power to heal, and in the Gospel of Luke Jesus quotes Isaiah when he reads the scroll in the synagogue saying "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...". The Holy Spirit is also involved in the commissioning of his apostles and the birth of his church.

The Holy Spirit is neither Father, nor Son but the third person of the Trinity. In Hebrew the word Spirit is feminine, in Greek it is neuter, and in Latin it is masculine, so while it is hard to conceive of such a "person" we do know that the Holy Spirit is the active presence of God's love. The Holy Spirit both protects those who testify about God and ensures that what they say is right, and good, and true.

Although we know that God has acted in history especially with the incarnation of the Son the Holy Spirit is important because the Holy Spirit continues the work of the Father and the Son here and now not just back then.

The Holy Spirit continues God's work in us. The church has always been a bit cautious about the Holy Spirit even as it evokes the Holy Spirit in the sacraments and in the decisions of its councils. The church has been cautious about the Holy Spirit because it shows up in unexpected ways in unexpected people – a tradition going right back to the selection of David as the King of Israel – and therefore is not controlled by human kind.

Think about how anxious the thought of speaking in tongues makes most of us, or anything that smacks of the charismatic movement – just witness the dramatic experience of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal movement that began in the early 20th century and now has almost 300 million followers worldwide.

The Holy Spirit makes God's presence and power available to us. The Holy Spirit does not rest; the Holy Spirit is not bound by doctrine or law as we human beings have understood

them. The Holy Spirit drives us, goads us, propels us into new experiences of God whether descending on the Jews gathered for Pentecost so that they understood foreign languages and caused tongues like flames to dance on their heads, or compelling Philip to speak with and baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Spirit is always pushing our boundaries; leading us to connect with our sisters and brother in Christ in other denominations, to embrace our LGBTQ brothers and sister ...the Holy Spirit is at working to expand our acceptance of God's work in creation.

The Holy Spirit is at work in all the sacraments including ordination AND the Holy Spirit also works through lay people, finding whoever is most responsive to God's call to further God's plan of salvation. All you have to do is look through our liturgical guide *Holy Women, Holy Men* to read about those who have been led by the Holy Spirit. In this past week we have remembered Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in a cabinet positions who was instrumental in the establishment of Social Security, or the martyrs of Sudan, 4 million people who have been persecuted, exiled, and/or killed for holding fast to their faith over the last 35 years, or Thurgood Marshall who was the first African American to sit on the Supreme Court. It was he who successfully argued that separate but equal was unconstitutional and this landmark case initiated desegregation of our public schools.

It is here in the church that we come to know the Holy Spirit in a new way. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus present for us, makes the thanksgiving we offer in the Eucharist not just a memorial but a moment when the past becomes present and through our Eucharistic prayer transforms the water and the wine into the body and the blood. The Holy Spirit is the force or agency that gives us new life in Christ when we are baptized. It is through the Holy Spirit that our lives are transformed in Christ, what we call the process of sanctification, growing into his likeness, something we could never do by ourselves but by the grace of God we are enabled to do through the Holy Spirit. Granted we may not always do such a good job but the Holy Spirit is there, the active force in the forgiveness of sins. After 50 days without the confession I will once again pronounce absolution and say "by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life".

The Holy Spirit enlivens the life in community, not just the universal church but right here at St. Paul's. Think about what drew you here, what keeps you here through thick and thin and some of you have been through a lot of thin. I think about what Mo. Paulette, the priest who was here before me marveled at the spirit of prayer that pervades this place during worship. It's not about the niceness of all you people although you are generally nice it's about the feeling that together you are, we are, the people of God, It's what kept Paulette and her husband Walter coming here even after Paulette retired, all through way through her final illness. It's what keeps any of you here through loss and it's what brings people back when it comes time to have your children baptized and to raise them in the church.

The Holy Spirit is also what makes preaching more than just a lecture. Preaching is hard work and it requires prayer and reading and reflection and when it is done right, if only for a moment the Holy Spirit does show up to the words of the preacher into more than just our own personal reflection on scripture and the events of the day. Sometimes you may hear it and sometimes you may not. While I accept responsibility for the times that you may not, please know that in the moments when you do, I too have been transformed. In truth the Holy Spirit

enlivens all of our gifts, especially in community. According to Paul the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. (Gal 5.22) some of that has been in evidence this week as I watched the garden outside the Kindercare room get turned over and planted by Teresa, then watched Dee spread mulch, and then saw Jeannine plant a few extra pansies. Even the facelift given the parish hall so inspired one of our AA participants that he painted the church door to match the doors on the parish hall and has been working his way around the brickwork.

So yes, the Holy Spirit is at work here, it is at work in you, it is at work among your friends and families, at work, in your other volunteer activities. The Spirit is Jesus' gift to us all. The Holy Spirit, elusive, powerful, joyful, the Advocate, Comforter, and God, the third person of the Trinity now and forever,

Amen.