

Day of Pentecost B (5/20/2018)

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

The Holy Spirit is the promised Advocate, the enduring witness to Jesus in his absence. The ministry of Jesus is ever new through the work of the Spirit, inspiring every generation of disciples to meet the present and future with trust and confidence.

Pentecost: the one Sunday a year devoted to the Holy Spirit, right? This is the day to take stock of the Spirit's diverse roles and attributes. So, beginning with Genesis and concluding with Revelation, let's spend the next ten to fifteen minutes summing up the Holy Spirit's place in our faith, shall we? She is life-breath, pulsing through the veins and sinews of all living things. He is wind, rushing into our midst to stir us to acts of faith and love. It is fire, refining us by God's truth and anointing us to speak that truth to all who can hear. She is water, poured out on dry land to bring it to abundant life, and on all the heirs of God's promise as a blessing. He is cloud, overshadowing us with the divine presence and filling the world with God's glory. It is a dove, alighting on Jesus as a sign of God's favor and empowerment.¹ She is a sigh too deep for words, groaning with all the afflicted in anticipation of our redemption.

¹ See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, 23-25.

On second thought, isn't it ridiculous to imagine that we could contain the Holy Spirit to a single Sunday?² **The Spirit is nothing less than God's vitality, the life-giving and rousing influence by which God accomplishes God's purposes. It is, by nature, beyond our ability to summarize or control.** So, perhaps we ought to try to honor the third person of the Trinity instead by focusing on one area of the Spirit's work that is especially relevant to us today.

Consider the language in our Gospel from John: "When the Advocate comes," Jesus says, "the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ...he will guide you into all the truth... and he will declare to you the things that are to come." John conceives of the Holy Spirit in a distinct way. For him, the Spirit, in Greek, is *paraklētos*, translated in English as "the Paraclete," or in the New Revised Standard Version as "the Advocate." This word carries multiple connotations, such as "helper," "comforter," and "encourager." **In its most elementary sense, *paraklētos* means "one called alongside to help,"³ which is a beautifully simple way to understand the Spirit's activity. Reflecting on the past 120 years, how often do you suppose the Spirit of God has come alongside the people of Peace Lutheran Church to uphold and encourage us?**

Yet, Jesus has something more to say about the Spirit as *paraklētos*. The Advocate will testify specifically on his behalf, that is, **the Spirit will continue**

² Karoline Lewis, "A True Pentecost," <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5154>.

³ Kärkkäinen, 35.

to enlighten Jesus' followers with the truth as he has spoken it, even in his absence. This is no small promise. The Advocate, the Spirit of truth, will ensure that God's word in the flesh – the revelation of God in the person of Jesus – will not be restricted to a single moment in history, but will reach across time and space. To borrow the words of one commentator, “The promise of the [Spirit] thus stands as a testament to the reliability of Jesus and his love”⁴ generation after generation.

In other words, **the Spirit of God acts as the church's enduring witness to Jesus, facilitating “fresh encounters with the words of Jesus”⁵ in every new season of our life together.** This means that there are ways in which Jesus is capable of calling and equipping us today that we could not have understood in a previous era. “I still have many things to say to you,” he insists, “but you cannot bear them now. ...[The Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

I'm often reminded of our congregation's debate in the 1970s over the prospect of moving to a new location partway up South Hill, the current site of Celebration Lutheran Church. There were reasons to stay and reasons to leave, but in the end, Peace decided to both sponsor a new congregation on the hill *and* remain at 3rd and East Pioneer in downtown Puyallup. Who could have known at the time how that decision would impact our sense of purpose forty years later? Last year, we launched a weekly feeding program for dozens

⁴ Gail R. O'Day, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX, 776.

⁵ *Ibid.* 777.

of students at Spinning Elementary School, and we began hosting a low-cost after-school program for students at both Spinning and Stewart. In light of these ministries with our downtown neighbors, “Feed my lambs” and “Tend my sheep”⁶ have taken on a very specific meaning! Just think how the Holy Spirit was at work decades ago so that we might hear Jesus’ words in a new way today.

Dear church, how might the Holy Spirit be at work now so that we might hear what we need to hear in the years to come? The promise of Pentecost is that the Advocate – our helper, comforter, and encourager – will not neglect to show up and guide us into the truth. And in this way, the ministry of Jesus will be ever new in and through Peace Lutheran Church, inspiring us to meet the present and future with trust and confidence. So, here’s to the next 120 years!

⁶ John 21:15, 16.