

Good morning! Today we celebrate Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Spirit - the occasion that is often called the birthday of the Church. When Pastor Lynell offered opportunities to Cindy and me weeks back, I chose today to preach because Pentecost is one of my favorite church days. While this day may take a back seat to other church holidays such as Easter and Christmas, this is an important day because it is all about the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to his disciples before he ascended into heaven.

Pentecost Sunday is a time when we deliberately celebrate what is likely the most mysterious entity of our triune God: The Holy Spirit which is also called the Paraclete. Παράκλητος (Paráklētos) in Greek means the same as Advocatus in Latin: "One who has been called to one's side." Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be with his Church until the end of time and would preserve the authenticity of the Church's faith. "The Advocate...will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

The personal name of the Third Person of the Trinity is "the Spirit," or the "Holy Spirit," which words describe his nature as being a pure, spiritual, immaterial existence, and his character as being in himself and in his workings pre-eminently holy.

When we examine the word the other name for the third person of the trinity and look at the alternate name, Paraclete, we discover the complexity of this side of our triune God. This name is so full in its meaning. In many respects it is also very difficult to convey completely its entire meaning. It is like those Hebrew words such as Shalom which contain so much in a small package. On the surface it may appear relatively simple but, once one digs deeper it literally means or signifies to be "called to" or to be "called beside" another to aid him or her.

The word Paraclete is synonymous with the Latin word advocatus, a person called in to speak for us by pleading our cause. Yet, as we have come to use the word "advocate" in a different sense, that word, although it would, like that of "comforter," convey a part of the meaning, would not contain it all. Paraclete is wider than "advocate" and wider than "comforter." I think the meaning of the word "Paraclete" might be put under the two headings of one "called to," and one "calling to." One called to means that this entity is coming to our aid, coming to assist us in our weaknesses. It also suggests advocating, guiding, and coming alongside. The Paraclete is also our teacher, our encourager, our comforter and the one that nudges us and reminds us. The Paraclete strengthens us, instructs us, teaches us, and wraps us in the gentle blanket of kindness. Paraclete is a deeply complex word, just as the mysterious entity that it attempts to describe.

We see in John 20 the time when Jesus gave this amazing gift. We see just a few verses up in the previous **passage the story of** how Jesus had just re-appeared to **weeping Mary Magdalene**.

Now he has appeared miraculously within a locked room to his disciples. Let's look at John 20:19-23, from The Message:

¹⁹⁻²⁰Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you." Then he showed them his hands and side.

²⁰⁻²¹The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting: "Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you."

²²⁻²³Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he said. "If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?"

In this post-resurrection experience we see a miraculous event. Just like the woman who was healed by touching the hem of his garment, even just being in Jesus' proximity and breathing the same air he had breathed was capable of a miracle.

In this pandemic environment we are all aware now of the potential that exists in our exhaled breath. I read an article that explained the composition of air exhaled by humans: After a human breathes in Earth's air which is roughly 78 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen, he or she exhales a mixture of compounds similar to the air inhaled: 78 percent nitrogen, 16 percent oxygen, 0.09 percent argon, and four percent carbon dioxide.

But that exhaled air also contains as many as 3,500 compounds, most of which are in microscopic amounts - oxygen, cells, fluid, and even bacterial and viral particles. Those disciples probably didn't know all that - they just were trying to explain what they believed had just happened. What they recognized was that something miraculous had just occurred. Jesus' had effortlessly, perhaps in his exhaled breath, given them a gift that was beyond human comprehension. They had been given a gift more magnificent and more powerful than they could have even imagined: the power of the Holy Spirit!

Luke the physician describes the encounter slightly differently in Luke 24: 48-49. Again, we are looking at the Message:

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹He went on to open their understanding of the Word of God, showing them how to read their Bibles this way. He said, "You can see now how it is written that the Messiah suffers, rises from the dead on the third day, and then a total life-change through the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations—starting from here, from

Jerusalem! You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high."

And with these words, the disciples stayed on in Jerusalem and it was 49 days or seven Sundays later when the disciples were gathered once again that the promised gift was delivered. The followers of Jesus Christ were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks. Once again, we look at the sudden appearance of the Holy Spirit. This is The Message: ¹⁻⁴When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

So, on this special Sunday, Pentecost Sunday we remember this sudden, powerful and magnificent gift. This gift has been freely given, just as Jesus Christ gave us the gift of eternal life through his work on the cross, the gift of the Holy Spirit has also been given freely. The comforts of the Holy Spirit do not depend upon health, strength, wealth, position, or friendship; the Holy Spirit comforts us through the truth, and the truth does not change.

In celebration we wear red, the color associated with the burning power of the Holy Spirit. When we are gathered in the sanctuary, one of my favorite memories is looking around and seeing all the red clothing: it is a magnificent sight. But even more exciting is knowing that the Holy Spirit is alive and doing miraculous things in and through the individuals wearing those red garments.

There are other symbols we associate with the Holy Spirit, like the dove of peace. The Dove is a symbol for the Holy Spirit inspired by Jesus's baptism. In each of the four gospel accounts, it is written that the Spirit of God "descended upon Jesus as a dove."

The dove has been used among many Christian denominations as a symbol for the Holy Spirit as well as a general symbol for peace, purity, and new beginnings. I find myself drawn to these symbols of the Holy Spirit and I would encourage you to begin looking for how they are infused into many places.

One of my favorite pieces of art I selected on my trip to Israel after my graduation from Fuller Seminary back in 2005. This is the piece. It is Jerusalem depicted in layered paper. In addition to having dimension, it is in the shape of the dove of peace. While I have a collection of crosses that adorn my walls, I have also become increasingly interested in

doves. When I visited our found father's home, Mount Vernon, I noticed the weathervane on the roof: it has the dove of peace. In many respects, I believe that dove is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit's involvement in the beginnings of our nation. I purchased in the gift shop an ornament with that dove and it hangs on a light in my master bathroom where it reminds me of this entity of the trinity.

And while our world seems to be in an upheaval and what is familiar has changed drastically, seeing that dove of peace while I brush my teeth before bed is gently reassuring.

I am reminded of the awesome power and gentle kindness that infuse even the darkest of situations. That small voice that whispers promptings in our heart. While I love all of the entities of God, Jesus, Father God, the Holy Spirit is what I think is the power that allows us to do great things, even if we think they are small things.

During this time of isolation in many respects my life has changed radically but in others, it has remained the same. In my veterinary practice, things have shifted from clients coming into the hospital building and being greeted by someone at the front desk and then being escorted into an exam room. Now, the client remains outside or in their car. Whichever person is working suddenly has many more steps in their day...running back and forth, ferrying pets, invoices, and payments. But I am so very grateful amidst this global pandemic that God has so richly blessed me. I am humbled by the Lord's amazing provision, peace and presence. I am grateful for the kindnesses that are extended for me and how I see the Lord at work.

We know that when God sent the comforter Jesus had promised, he came down from heaven. What we must not forget is that he has never left us, and he will never turn his back on us. The Holy Spirit is all powerful and all knowing. The Holy Spirit dwells in his people and within his church, the Body of Christ perpetually. The Holy Spirit can be called upon to work in us because he is always here, within us.

It is a part of the Spirit's work to make us understand what Jesus taught. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can learn from the Scriptures the words of Jesus for ourselves. We are better able to understand these teachings flow as gifts from the very the Spirit of God. Through the Holy Spirit we can fully understand the doctrines of Christ and his teachings. Through the Holy Spirit we may obtain peace.

While we may be living through unprecedented times we are not alone in this journey. I would encourage you to let the Spirit of God reveal God to you as the everlasting God, who loved you before the world was, as the unchanging God who never can turn away

his heart from you. I would encourage you to allow the Spirit of God reveal to you the pierced hands and feet of Jesus. Let him enable you to put your finger into the prints of the nails and allow your faith to be strengthened.

Because the Holy Spirit is with us and we are Christ's beloved we can call upon the Holy Spirit to teach us and to walk with us on our journeys. We can ask in our suffering for the Holy Spirit to sustain us, to ask him to give us the right words. We can ask for help when we feel inadequate, when on our own we feel weak and the tasks which lie ahead to daunting. When we are called to bear witness to God's power, we can ask, and we will receive divinely inspired wisdom. When we are called to service, we have someone whom we can turn to in our hour of need.

More times than I could possibly count, I have called upon the Holy Spirit to empower me to accomplish that which I feel incapable of doing on my own. I have asked the Lord to strengthen my hands while in surgery, to come alongside me when I am sad and fearful, to rain down his mercy and power and vindicate me when my enemy's attacks seem like too much.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that our faith can bring change and to offer hope. Over the past few years my sweet sister, Julia, has been walking a difficult path. I have asked people close to me to pray for her and God has heard her prayers. Julia had asked for prayers as she prepared for a potential job change.

Julia had been asked to select a word to encourage teachers at the school where she is a middle school assistant principal. With the help of her daughter, my niece Shelby, she chose the word hope to be apt art of a collage during Teacher appreciation week. She texted me the picture and wrote this, "I'm just so overwhelmed with emotions right now."

But what Julia did not know is that God had already provided that Hope. Even when the situation seemed bleak, God was at work through his Holy Spirit. A few weeks later Julia would find out that that hope was not in vain: God had answered her prayers and provided another year in her current position.

Once again, both Julia and I were shown that not only the Lord and the Holy Spirit our main force - the Holy Spirit is our sole force. He is worthy of our trust and complete confidence.

What would I have you take away from today's sermon? Love the Spirit, worship the Spirit, trust the Spirit, obey the Spirit, and, as a church, cry mightily to the Spirit.

The world is a vastly different place than it was just a few short months ago. The number of people who have succumbed to the Coviden 19 virus is horrifying and the number of people needing food and with questions about where or when their next paycheck or unemployment check may arrive is daunting. But we must not be discouraged. God has provided for all our needs. He has always known our needs and the fact that we need him most.

The American poet Emily Dickinson wrote of hope this way in her poem Hope is the thing with feathers:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

In this dark hour with the deep scar of racial tension, senseless violence and racially motivated killings, I implore you to join with me as we call upon the Holy Spirit to rain down with power.

Come, Holy Spirit now! You are with us. Fill us. Forever change our hearts. Empower us to be your hands and feet. May the Holy Spirit's peace, justice and presence be known and felt among us during this difficult chapter in human history. May the Lord fire our hearts with this sacred flame. May this Pentecost stand out from all other days, may it make the close of this year and this unparalleled time of hardship and challenge stand out in our history from all other years for good reasons. Let George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbury, and all the other people of color whose lives have ended tragically not be in vain. We pray for our first responders, our elderly, those on the fringe with barely enough to get by. Lord, you know all those in need and we call upon you to rain down your Holy Spirit with justice and might. May your Holy Fire sweep through this nation and bring justice and peace. AMEN.