

Pentecost: Spirit of Direction and Disruption

Sermon by Pastor Patrick fish
 Festival of Pentecost
 May 19-20, 2018
 Acts 2:1-21

*Grace & Peace to you from Christ,
 who sent the Holy Spirit to call and comfort us.
 To direct and disrupt us. Amen.*

Move 1: Cannot contain the wonder of the Spirit

Today is Pentecost Sunday. The day we remember that the Holy Spirit has arrived. We rejoice that Christ fulfilled his promise to send the “Paraclete,” (the Greek word used to describe Holy Spirit), who walks alongside us as our constant companion and will always be our advocate leading us to the truth, way, and life of Jesus.

And, at least for me, I have trouble with today. Because I have a tendency to want to encapsulate in one day and in one sermon the entirety of the Holy Spirit.

This week, I was reminded by theologian and author Karoline Lewis to avoid this. As she states, the “Spirit cannot be constrained to a Sunday. One sermon cannot summarize the Spirit. In no way can the activity of the Spirit be condensed to 10 minutes.” [1]

So, today my sermon will be four hours long ...

No, that’s why we have a whole summer dedicated to the season of Pentecost. Because it’s impossible and does a disservice to the Holy Spirit to try to neatly explain who the Spirit is, what the Spirit does, and why the Spirit’s activity matters.

Yet, we do try. We try to put the Spirit in a box. It’s our attempt to try to control the Spirit. But today I am reminded—and I hope you are, too—that the Spirit is always bigger. It’s always beyond our human limitations. We forget the imaginative, wild, dynamic, and creative nature of the Spirit.

The Spirit that gave Jesus the ability to lead, teach, and heal. The Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness directly following his baptism is the same Spirit that now is active and alive in us and loose in the world. [2]. That same Spirit gives us ability and calls us to testify.

New members who are joining us today, we take the teachings of Jesus seriously and strive to live Spirit-led lives. But aren’t you glad we don’t send you out into the wilderness for forty days upon joining us? “Welcome to the Community of St. Mark’s. Now we will let you loose in Aurora without your GPS or phones. We’ll pick you up in forty days.” Man, people would be out the door trying to sign up to join our church.

This weekend, we don't haze our new members; we welcome them. We rejoice in the fact that they, like us, have been claimed by God forever. That they, like us, will encounter Christ's grace through Word, song, prayer, and sacrament. That they, like us, have gifts and abilities given by the Spirit.

Move 2: Holy Spirit causes us to live differently

The Holy Spirit has brought us all together. Once strangers, we are now friends. But more than that, we are now brothers and sisters united in Christ. Family who don't just confess Christ with our lips but do so with our whole lives. Who continually learn and are led to walk the way of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We proclaim these truths and know these truths: the truths of inclusion, kinship, service, and humility. They are different and are opposites of our experiences. They originate not from this world but are from the one Truth, who showed us first. Who claimed us first. Who loved us first: Jesus.

Our world stresses categories. Separation. Exclusion. "In" groups and "out" groups. Winners and losers. Haves and have nots. And we have bought into the myth that we don't belong to each other.

Mother Teresa was right when she diagnosed the problem of this world. She said the problem and sin we live with is that we have forgotten our common humanity. We have forgotten that we all belong to one another. We have forgotten God lives in everyone.

On Pentecost weekend, I would add we have neglected to claim that the Spirit is alive and active in everyone.

The Spirit of Truth has come not on the select few, but on all. The Spirit came to reveal the truth. But the truth the Spirit was sent for isn't confined to just knowledge.

The Spirit didn't come to make us perfect theological thinkers. Or to bestow upon us perfect doctrine. As Scripture states, the Spirit of truth came down to expose the world's sin and to reveal and direct us in the way to Christ. To transform us from being defined by darkness, hate, and violence to being people who follow and live according to light, love, and peace. [3].

The Holy Spirit descended and arrived here on earth. Then to the apostles and now to us, his disciples, to be our constant companion. To be the living presence of God within and among us all. [4].

Let us not try to reduce the Spirit's reach. Let us not try to control where or how the Spirit will act. Let us not be fooled by limited thinking of this world. Instead, let us be led by the guidance and direction of the Spirit, who always is bigger and beyond.

Who always and forever shows us the way of Christ. Who always and forever draws us to be in relationship with God. Shown and drawn by the Spirit, we cannot help but have our steps follow Christ's. We cannot help but model our lives after the life Jesus lived.

Move 3: Acts passage and what it reveals about the Spirit

The Holy Spirit draws us. Yes. But the aspect we gloss over too quickly is that the Spirit also *disrupts*. It disrupts our thinking. Disrupts the world. Disrupts us and how we orient our daily lives.

That's what stands out to me in my reflection of Scripture this week. Especially in the dramatic Acts passage we read today.

The disciples are in that upper room. Waiting for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. For the Holy Spirit to arrive. And the whole earth starts to shake, wind whips and roars, and tongues of fire rest on each of the disciples. The Spirit gives them ability to speak in languages other than that of their native language.

The moment the apostles have been waiting for since Jesus' death has finally happened. And maybe they thought this was going to be their ride off into the sunset. Their happy ending. Little did they know the delivery of the Spirit signified just the beginning.

Their work along with the Spirit has just begun. Now comforted by the presence of God, they are called and sent out into the world. Their old lives will never be the same. The world will never be the same. Thanks to the disruption of the Spirit.

But we remember that they, and we, as followers of Christ, are sent into the world. We are never alone. The Spirit empowers us. Equips us. Enriches us for our struggle here on Earth.

As David Lose states, "The Good News isn't that we are done when the Holy Spirit enters into us. The Good News is the Spirit continues to help us see possibilities where others only see problems. The Spirit grants us strength and energy to climb the mountains with confidence and joy so that we can benefit others." [5]

The world will continue to speak language of despair, hopelessness, and apathy. Every month there seems to be another school shooting. Prayers lifted up for the families and community of Santa Fe High School in Texas. Beyond our nation, there are the five dozen of our Palestinian brothers and sisters killed. We turn on the news and once again hear the divisive rhetoric of our world leaders.

We are accustomed to it. It has become our new normal. Friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not lose hope. We do not let this become our normal. For we put our faith not in the promises made by men. We put our faith in the promises of Christ. Who always fulfills his promises. Who did fulfill his promise by sending the Spirit. To act as our advocate. To disrupt the world and disrupt us.

The Spirit opens our eyes to the way of Jesus. Opens our hearts to love like Jesus loved. To welcome like Jesus welcomed. To serve as Jesus served.

Move 4: Tent Biloxi Story

My freshman year of college, the Spirit disrupted my life and started me on a path that I continue to walk, with the Spirit's direction and guidance, today.

At that time in my life, I wanted to be a doctor. I knew I wanted to help people, and I thought I would do so by practicing medicine. Well, my freshman summer, I got an internship down at a free medical clinic in Biloxi, Mississippi. That city had been decimated by Hurricane Katrina, and so I spent that 2007 summer seeing patients from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Seeing anywhere from 50-60 patients a day.

There's one man I'll never forget. His name was Gary.

During the first few weeks I was there, Gary would show up. Sometimes just to get a coffee. Other times to seek medical care. Other times for hygiene products. I got to know him a bit each time he'd come in.

By the middle of the summer, I found out that Gary was living in the forest located a few blocks away. The Spirit put it on my heart that I needed to do something. So I decided next time I would see him, I would buy him a tent.

The following week, Gary stopped in to be seen by a doctor. I told him not to leave, that I had a gift for him. I raced into my car and drove over to the local Walmart.

Now, remember I'm in Mississippi and I'm a Midwest kid. Hadn't quite gotten the southern dialect down by the middle of the summer.

So, I get into Walmart and I'm in a rush, and I decide I'm going to ask the first employee I see where their tents are. Right away I see an employee, and I ask her, "Where are your tents located?"

She looks at me like I'm an alien. So, I again ask. And again she's dumbfounded by my question. So, I'm doing charades in the store. "You know a tent. A thing you sleep in. Camping. Outdoors."

And finally she smiles and says, 'Oh, you mean a *taint*.' [*spoken with an extended Southern drawl*]

So, I finally get a tent. Pay for it. Drive back to the clinic. And hand it to Gary. He has tears streaming down his face. Thanks me and we both go on with our days.

A week later, I see Gary again. I'm excited to see him and more importantly ask him about the tent.

So, I go over and ask, "Hey, how are you liking the tent?"

And he shared that he had given it away.

I must admit that my first reaction was anger. Like, seriously. I gave that to you. And you just gave it away. Why?

But, fortunately, the Spirit gave me the ability that day to hold in all those emotions and just wait. I paused and then Gary continued.

He went on to share how he had used it for a few days but had seen a mom with two children living in the forest, too. He shared how the Spirit had put it on his heart to pay it forward. And how they needed the tent more than he did.

As he shared, you could see his face just light up. His grin could have lit up this sanctuary.

God moment. Holy Spirit, alive and active.

Here I thought I was being the good steward. Doing the good deed. Gary helped me realize that the Spirit is always bigger. Always beyond what I could imagine. Always looking after people in this world. In ways we could never even imagine.

Gary revealed Christ to me that day. Gary helped me see that the Spirit dwells and moves through all of us. Not just some of us. The Spirit descended and arrived for all.

Amen.

Resources:

[1] Karoline Lewis. "Dear Working Preacher: A True Pentecost." www.workingpreacher.org, May 20, 2018.

[2] David Lose. "Dear Working Preacher: Pentecost Change." www.workingpreacher.org, May 27, 2012.

[3] Judith Jones. "Commentary on John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15." www.workingpreacher.org, May 20, 2018.

[4] Judith Jones. "Commentary on John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15." www.workingpreacher.org, May 20, 2018.

[5] David Lose. "...in the Meantime" *Pentecost B 2018: Pentecost Possibilities.* www.davidlose.net, May 20, 2018.

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