

Day of Pentecost (Year C)

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Everyone needs an advocate. When the going gets rough, when the rubber meets the road, when the storms come and the waters gets treacherous, in those moments we need advocates - people who stand up for us, people who speak words of wisdom and truth, people who will encourage and challenge us. An advocate is someone who believes in you. An advocate is someone who has your back. An advocate is someone who will tell you what you need to hear especially when it is something that you don't want to hear. An advocate is someone who stands up in your defense when the rest of the world seems to push you into a corner. Everyone needs an advocate.

Yesterday we had a men's breakfast where about a dozen of us gathered to fellowship together and to pray for one another. After enjoying a wonderful meal and catching up with one another, the topic of advocates came up (such is an occupational hazard of dining with the preacher as he is still working on a sermon!). As the food on our plates began to disappear and many of us were well into our second cup of coffee, we shared with one another about the advocates that we had been blessed with in our lives, people who had our backs and supported us and encouraged us to explore our fullest potentials.

Together, around the two tables in the fellowship hall, stories were shared about the people in our lives that were crucial in our upbringing. Some of us shared stories about our parents, how they taught us the difference between "right" and "wrong" and gave us wisdom when it wasn't clear which was which. Others shared stories about how, looking back on their many years, they discovered that their parents had advocated for them in ways they didn't appreciate or know of at the time. More than one of us shared stories about teachers who went above and beyond the call of duty to empower us with the knowledge and courage to grow and develop as young men.

Many of us shared how appreciative we were for our spouses advocating on our behalf. Some of us in the group have been married for more than fifty or sixty years. Together, we shared how much of a blessing it is that our loved ones advocate and support us. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that they always agree with what we are doing, but rather that they encourage us and love us enough to speak the truth in love.

Then, several of us in the group mentioned that, for them, this Church has been an advocate for them during difficult times in their life. When the spouse's health takes a nose dive, when the depression sinks in, when patience runs thin, when the children aren't behaving, when the marriage goes through a rough patch, this Church had advocated for them in these difficult periods of trial and tribulation.

Everyone needs an advocate. As my wisdom grows with my age, I realize that I would not be here before you today without a great cloud of witnesses who have been my advocates throughout my life.

I wouldn't be here without an advocate named Mr. Shaw, a saintly old man at my church growing up who would greet me every Sunday, give me a warm hug, and give me a stick of Juicy Fruit chewing gum from a brown paper bag, and look into my eyes and say, "Stephen, know that you are loved!"

I wouldn't be here without an advocate named Gay Fearing, my grandmother, who taught me at a young age to be respectful, considerate, polite, and socially. She also by forcing me to take swimming lessons when I was a young boy. Boy I was a pain in the butt. However, fifteen years later, she was the first person I called when I passed my test to become a certified life guard.

I wouldn't be here without an advocate named Peter Hobbie, whose portrait hangs in my office here at the church. Hobbie (as he was lovingly referred as) was my religion professor in college who was a mentor for me and an advocate for me when I didn't believe in myself. Without his encouragement, I might not have gone to seminary.

I wouldn't be here without two advocates called Catherine and Matthew, my parents. They have a special place in heaven reserved just for them for all the crap I put them through growing up. My parents, both teachers, taught me the importance of education. They also instilled in me the importance of commitment. My parents advocated for me by teaching me that it was better to commit myself 100% to a few things than to commit halfway to many things.

Finally, I wouldn't be here without an advocate by the name of Tricia Garrett Fearing, my wife. She is my greatest advocate, my strongest supporter, and a steadfast presence of love, wisdom, and encouragement.

It occurs to me that each of these advocates were advocates for me because they themselves had advocates for them. If we were to trace the "lineage" of our advocates and their advocates and their advocates, it would look as if we are trees with very expanded roots, indeed. Trees sustained only by deep roots supplying them nutrients of wisdom and love.

It is fitting, then, that the Holy Spirit is often referred to in the Bible as "the Advocate" (with a big "A"). Last week, we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord Jesus as he rose into heaven and took his rightful seat at the right hand of God the Father (as we say most weeks in the Apostles' Creed). As Jesus departed, he blessed the disciples and promised them an Advocate that was to come to them in a short time.

Today, on this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the coming of that Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Imagine yourself in the room with the disciples. Around you are people from many different countries. As you listen to them converse you hear many languages. Together you pray and learn from one another as best you can without understanding everyone. Suddenly, a great WHOOSH is heard and you feel a great wind erupt from out of nowhere. All the candles in the room are at once blown out and flames instead appear above the heads of everyone in the room, including your own.

Then, the person across the room whose language you couldn't understand all the sudden makes sense to you. Likewise, he beams as he realizes that he can understand you! A great commotion arises as everyone begins to make the same realization.

Thanks to these lovely banners above us made by Sharon Morgan, we literally have that same flame above our heads this very day. The day of Pentecost is a day to remember that we have been gifted with the presence of the Spirit. We have been gifted with the presence of an Advocate, without whom we would be hopelessly lost.

Whether they realized it or not, each and every one my personal advocates - the people I mentioned a few minutes ago who have helped shaped me into the person I am today - each one of them was empowered to advocate for me because they themselves had an Advocate in the Holy Spirit.

And that's the truth that we remember on Pentecost. We remember that we are advocates for each other because we have an advocate - *the* Advocate - in the Holy Spirit, gifted to us by the Ascended Jesus Christ.

Ask: who are some advocates you've had in your lifetime?

Ask: what are some ways that we are Advocates for each other as a church community?

Ask: are there any people in our community that are in special need of an advocate?