

To Your Advantage

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

Acts 2: 1-21

May 23, 2021- Pentecost

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

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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.'

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When we were expecting our first child, we were thrilled, excited, overjoyed...and very curious. Would our baby be a boy or a girl? When would the baby be born? Who would she or he look like? What would she or he be like? Friends and family shared in our excitement and envisioning. Most were absolutely sure that the baby would be a boy, and one co-worker was certain that I was carrying twins. Over the months of pregnancy we readied ourselves for this little baby, this new little person. We painted the nursery, filled it with baby furniture, decorated it with Disney characters. We took Lamaze classes, and we watched my belly grow and grow. We kept getting ready, even though we did not know exactly what we were readying ourselves for. Months of anticipation, months of curiosity, came down to one sentence in the delivery room, "It's a girl—a beautiful, healthy baby girl!"

This time of waiting, this time of knowing but not knowing, this time of preparing diligently when it is not really clear what is being prepared for is the closest I have been able to imagine what the disciples experienced as they awaited the fulfilling of Jesus' final promise to them. "I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Jesus' final words of instruction to the disciples before he blessed them and ascended back to heaven, were a promise that help, that divine power, was coming for them, yet they did not yet know just what it would be to be clothed with power from on high, or when that would be. This group that not all that long ago had scattered in fear and denial when Jesus was arrested, now stayed together as they returned to Jerusalem and began their mysterious wait.

While they must certainly have had questions, they also had a promise and reassurance, "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

They did not know what they were waiting for, just who they were waiting for, or when the Advocate would arrive, yet they trusted and waited.

But who was this Advocate who was being sent to them and would clothe them with power from on high? How would they recognize the Advocate? Since Jesus had come as a baby, so was certainly not recognized as the Messiah, the Son of God, was this true again? Was the Advocate someone already in their midst? Was someone new coming to join them? Would this be a prophet, a healer, a teacher, just as Jesus had been? They just could not know.

We can easily imagine that the disciples and followers of Jesus were excited and curious in their anticipation. They did not know what this Spirit would look like, be like, or when he would arrive, but they were getting ready even without knowing what they were readying themselves for.

'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.'

This was it, this is what they had been waiting for—yet never could have anticipated. The Spirit was not like anything or anyone they had imagined, yet was unmistakable in its presence. As the disciples began to speak in the languages of the astonished people gathered there. They discovered that the Holy Spirit was a bold, vibrant experience-- a clothing--of power given to

them. This power that could be felt but not seen was literally drawing in Jewish women and men of all nations, all races, all classes, into a common devotion and commotion. In each language, the disciples told the mighty works of God, and the crowd understood all that God had done for them through Jesus. The Way, the Christian Church, was born in that moment, in the moment when the disciples became leaders rather than followers, in the moment when the Christian story was told for everyone to hear, in the moment when the Holy Spirit came for all believers.

The Holy Spirit had come upon them in power, passion and purpose beyond belief, birthing the church in and among them. The church, the body of Christ, filled with persons created in the image of God, became empowered by the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit as bold signs of God's continuing presence in the world. The Advocate came with a passion as strong as a rushing wind, as radiant as a red flame, and with the purpose of equipping the disciples and the followers to embody what they had learned from Jesus and to take that universal message to all the nations. There were dreams and visions, there was unity and inclusion.

But, what does this amazing historical event mean for us today? Certainly none of us have ever suddenly been able to speak a foreign language, had small flames of fire dance over our heads or experienced a mighty wind that preceded a mystical encounter with God. But, we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. We have had the baptismal words prayed over us, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," as the water blessed our foreheads. We have had the words prayed over us, "The Holy Spirit be upon you, child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the church," as the Holy Spirit was poured out on us.

It is the experience, the sacrament, of baptism that connects us with our faith ancestors at Pentecost as we are called to the same tasks and ministry that they were called to: to work towards understanding, harmony and solidarity with all nations, all cultures, all people; to strive for peaceful unity; to share the good news with hope for the future. The same Spirit that blesses our baptism, that dwells within our very being, manifests itself over and over again as we live out our faith journey. Our presence here in this church this morning—virtual or in person—is evidence of the Holy Spirit's initiative and beckoning.

When the words of a hymn or a prayer deeply and profoundly touch your heart, or the words of a sermon feel as if they were just for you, or someone suddenly, unexpectedly says just the right words that are a balm and comfort for your wounds, or you found the energy and commitment to work on a church committee or support a justice cause although you already have a full schedule, then it may be with a whisper or a shout, and often as a surprise, the Holy Spirit has come, speaking to you and bearing messages in ongoing Pentecost moments.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, "It is for your own good that I go away – for if I do not go away you will not receive the Advocate, the helper, for your selves." Looking around us—seeing the world as it is, seeing the divisions and injustices that haunt us, and sometimes even seeing in the mirror, it may not seem as though Jesus leaving us on our own to carry on the mission was such a good idea after all, yet it is what we need to grow into and for this we have been given the Advocate and the promises of our baptism.

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to be 'God in us,' to comfort us that we might better comfort others, to advocate for us that we might better advocate for others, to equip us, that we might better equip others. The Holy Spirit kindles and ignites our dreams and visions, our goals and our prayers. Jesus' last earthly gift to us was this advantage.

"The Holy Spirit be upon you, child of God, disciple of Christ, member of the church."
Amen.