

## Pentecost A 2017 Sermon

Acts 2:1-21, I Corinthians 12:3b-13

### **John 20:19-23**

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

*(Much of this sermon is taken from a reflection on this Gospel by David Lose.)\**

In our Gospel reading two Sundays ago, Jesus, in his farewell address the night before he would be crucified, told his disciples: "I will not leave you orphans... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." (Jn. 14:15-18) In my sermon that day, I explained that the Greek word translated "Advocate" is *parakletos*, which *literally* means, "to call to one's side." The *parakletos* (or Advocate, or Holy Spirit) that Jesus promised he would ask his heavenly Father to send would walk alongside Jesus' followers after Jesus had gone.

In today's Gospel, that promise of Jesus is fulfilled: the risen Jesus breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Receive the *parakletos*; the one who walks alongside.

So, what does God's sending the Holy Spirit mean for us disciples of Jesus? Professor David Lose notes that "the arrival of the Holy Spirit doesn't **remove** the disciples from challenges and hardships, but rather *equips* them to persevere, even flourish, **amid** [the challenges and hardships]..." The Holy Spirit walks alongside.

"In [today's Gospel]," Dr. Lose continues, "... the disciples are hiding in the upper room out of fear that those who crucified *Jesus* may come after **them**. And what does Jesus do as he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them? He doesn't *take them away* from Jerusalem [and its dangers] or **fortify** the room in which they're hiding, but instead he *sends them out into* that dangerous world: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you' (20:21), [Jesus tells them] – and then he gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit to create in them the courage they will need" to face the difficulties they will certainly encounter as they are sent out to do God's work in the world.

And what does God's work look like? In his farewell address, Jesus told his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I

have loved you...” (*John 13:34-35*; see also *John 15:12, 17*) And Jesus has loved them not by coddling them, but by teaching them and challenging them. By the **example** of his own life, Jesus *showed* them what loving one another looks like: he spent a vast majority of his time **not** with those who were the privileged, the well-off, the “in” group; but rather with the poor, the outcast, foreigners, those of other religions, the sick, the marginalized. This is what the Father sent **Jesus** to do, and in today’s Gospel, **Jesus** sends his *disciples* out to do the same. And he gives them the Holy Spirit to walk alongside them.

“Similarly,” Dr. Lose notes, “in [today’s reading from] Acts the disciples are waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit and, once it comes, they go out to proclaim the good news to people they had good reason to believe would be at least skeptical if not outright hostile to their message.

“Again, in [today’s Epistle, St. Paul tells us that] the Spirit is given to enable... believers to look beyond their *individual* needs, hopes, or fears and equip them with distinct gifts, all in order to work **together** for the ‘common good’ (1 Cor. 12:7).

“Throughout these passages, we get the sense that the Holy Spirit isn’t some kind of super hero sent to *rescue* us, but rather [is] the one who equips, encourages, and stays with us, [walks alongside us,] helping us perceive the needs of our neighbors and community and then rise to the occasion to **meet** those needs with equal measures of tenacity, competence, and courage... The operative preposition with the Spirit seems to be *with* rather than *from* – as in being *with* us **during** challenges rather than taking those challenges away *from* us.

“... [God is] working *through* us **for** the common good, to care for the needs of our neighbors, community, and world. We, [both individually and as a church community,] have a purpose: to care for those around us as God cares for us, to make wherever we may find ourselves a better place, to share God’s love in word and deed that others may know they are not alone and, indeed, are loved. We are here, that is, not... for ourselves but for those around us.”

In each of our New Testament readings this Pentecost Sunday, we can discern two common themes. The first is the central importance of the community gathered together, the church. In the Acts reading, we are told, “When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were *all together* in one place.” The Spirit comes amidst this **gathering** of God’s people to worship on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. Indeed, the Greek word for “church” means “assembly, a gathering together.” In our reading from First Corinthians, **Paul** speaks of the Church as a living body, with each part of the body indispensable, each part given a manifestation of the Spirit for the **common** good, the good of the church and its mission. And in our Gospel reading, the Risen Jesus appears to his disciples and breathes on them the Holy Spirit as they are *gathered together*. So *assembling together* as a

community of faith, the body of Christ, is central in all of these Scripture passages.

But if *gathering together* is the **first** theme in these passages, the theme of “sending out” is either *explicit* or *implicit* in all of them, also. The whole book of Acts is about the apostles going out to the ends of the earth with the Gospel. In fact, the very **word** “apostle” means “one who is sent out.” And the only reason we even **have** Paul’s letters to the Corinthians is because Paul had been sent out by the risen Christ to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (foreigners). And we have already noted that Jesus, in today’s Gospel, sends his disciples out to be his loving, restoring presence to the world.

*Gathering together*, and *sending out*: It is what we, the church, do. We gather together to be strengthened by Word and Sacrament and prayer and song and community, and then, having been strengthened and empowered, we “go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit,” who walks alongside us.

This congregation, Christ Church, is a community which **gathers** to be strengthened and renewed, and then is **sent out** to be the hands and feet and voice and love of Christ to those outside these walls.

Today, we recognize two very beloved members of this church who have been such an integral part of this assembly, this part of Christ’s body we call Christ Church. They have **gathered** with us *every* Sunday (unless sick or out of town), serving in worship, leadership, teaching, praying and so many other ways; and then they have gone forth into the world, sent out to be the hands, feet, voice, and heart of Jesus to all those they meet. They have been an integral part of the body of Christ in this place, using all their many gifts to help us grow together, more and more, into the likeness of Christ. And they have been shining examples of what it is to be a true disciple of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has surely walked alongside them, and I know that the Spirit will continue to do so, blessing those whose lives they will touch in their new community.

And I know the Holy Spirit will continue to walk alongside us, also, here at Christ Church. Yes, a dynamic part of the body of Christ in this place is re-locating, but the Holy Spirit will inspire and call others among us, I am sure, to continue to grow the body of Christ in this place, raising up new leaders from this gathering, with your own unique and life-giving gifts. Perhaps some of you will fill the ministry positions that Dan and Debi’s leaving will open; perhaps you are being called to a ministry that has not yet been formed. Be inspired by Debi & Dan’s powerful example and witness; but be open to the Spirit calling you in a unique and equally powerful way.

Dan and Debi, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being open to the Holy Spirit’s flow in your lives, and for being such clear conduits of God’s love. God bless you richly in your new community and ministries!

AMEN

\* All quotes are from David Lose: “Pentecost A: With, not From”; ...*in the Meantime* blog, Posted: 31 May 2017 04:38 AM PDT  
<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/05/pentecost-a-with-not-from/>