

Prelude: The Comforter Has Come**[Annie Schulz]****Gathering Thoughts and Prayer:****[Beth Woelk]**

Welcome to worship for Sunday May 23rd, the Feast of Pentecost that glorious final day in the season of resurrection. We live in the midst of chaotic and unsettling times and may feel that like the apostles at the time of Pentecost, we too are in a state of hiding away behind closed doors and in the upper rooms of our lives, waiting until we have a better sense of how and when to move forward. Yet even as Covid 19 and vaccination roll outs continue to shape our lives, we gather in this way - apart but together - to remind one another of the overarching story that we are a part of. A reality in which the Holy Spirit flows in and among us breathing courage, hope and purpose into our hearts. So, we are ever grateful that we can continue to share worship experiences in this way through recorded and printed word and song and we give thanks for all those here on the worship team who offer their gifts and time to make this a reality. Today we look forward to hearing a reflection from Jan Steven who will explore the reality of this mysterious Holy Spirit - our loving advocate - present to us in the midst of difficult times and active in our world and lives today.

This week as I was preparing my heart for this time of Pentecost, I was thinking about those disciples behind closed doors gathered in their fear and unknowing. When suddenly there came a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind and it filled the house where they were sitting and they saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to speak in many languages. Acts chapter 2 says that those who witnessed this event were “amazed and perplexed”. Some were confused, others cynical. It made me reflect on the ways that I allow my expectations and cynicism to close my heart to the new voice rising like a fierce wind. My friend Christine Valters Paintner writes *“If when Pentecost arrives, you do not find yourself perplexed and amazed, consider releasing the tight grip of your certain thoughts and make space for holy surprise.”*

Pentecost demands that we pay attention with open hearts for the new things that God is always doing within and around us. Times of uncertainty and chaos call for

courageous imagination and creative response and beckon us to open to holy surprise.

Join me in this prayer of confession “Opening the Windows” written by Terri on A Place for Prayer blog:

O God, You who are always doing a new thing,
we confess that we sometimes close windows
against the fresh air of new ideas,
against the noise of other people’s worries,
against the winds of change.

God of every place and time,
we confess that we often draw the curtains
against people who are different,
against world news or community concerns.

Forgive us our insulation in our locked homes,
our shuttered churches,
the security systems on our hearts.
Open up our lives,
and let your Spirit blow through!
Amen

Call to Worship:

[Beth Woelk]

Come, Spirit of the Living God,
descend on us as we gather today.

Come like a refreshing wind,
bringing life to renew us as your people.

Spread among us like fire,
bringing clarity and energy to unite us as a just and caring community.

Come, Spirit of the Living God,
come and transform our lives by your power.

Hymn:

“Come, O Spirit, with Your Sound”

[WT #410]

*Come, O Spirit with Your sound, Like a wind quick rushing
Come from heaven, stir our hearts, Each disciple touching!
Mold our actions to Your will. You our service giving;
Move within our fellowship, Transform now our living!*

*Come, O Spirit with Your flame, Leaping tongues of fire
Come, and with Your glorious light, All our thoughts inspire!
Rest upon each servant's head, Till each one is speaking
Of our Christ, the Holy One, All the earth is seeking!*

*Come, O Spirit, fill your Church, Making strong our mission;
Fill Your daughters and Your sons, With a mighty vision.
Till the great and glorious day, When the whole creation
Sings Your praise as Lord and King, Giver of salvation!*

Scripture: **Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b (TPT)** **[Beth Woelk]**

O Lord, what an amazing variety of all you have created!
Wild and wonderful is this world you have made,
while wisdom was there at your side.
This world is full of so many creatures, yet each belongs to you!
And then there is the sea! So vast! So wide and deep—
swarming with countless forms of sea life, both small and great.
Trading ships glide through the high seas.
And look! There are the massive whales
bounding upon the waves.
All the creatures wait expectantly for you
to give them their food as you determine.
You come near and they all gather around,
feasting from your open hands,
and each is satisfied from your abundant supply.
But if you were to withhold from them and turn away,
they all would panic.
And when you choose to take away their breath,
each one dies and returns to the dust.
When you release your Spirit-Wind, life is created,
ready to replenish life upon the earth.
May God's glorious splendor endure forever!
May the Lord take joy and pleasure in all that has been made.
For the earth's overseer has the power to make it tremble;
just a touch of your finger and volcanoes erupt
as the earth shakes and melts.
I will sing my song to the Lord as long as I live!

Every day I will sing my praises to God.
May you be pleased with every sweet thought I have about you,
for you are the source of my joy and gladness.
My joyous, blissful shouts of “Hallelujah” are all because of you!

Prayers of the People:

[Doug Schulz]

Join your hearts with mine as I pray a kind of Spirit-blown-full version of the Lord’s Prayer. As you hear or read these words, recall that Jesus taught his followers things that would give them comfort and strength and inspiration once he had gone away from them. Isn’t it amazing that this simple prayer we call “the Lord’s Prayer” has empowered people to have faith in him, to feel close to him, through all the struggles of life – for 2000 years now! It’s because Jesus not only proclaimed a way to pray, he promised that the Loving Presence of God would fill us with understanding and power so that we could live this prayer into reality in the world. To say this prayer is comforting; to live it, transforming. God’s love poured out in us! So, keep in mind the needs and concerns of people close or far away as we pray.

Our Father, our gentle “Abba”, as Jesus spoke of you, our tender-hearted Parent who cares for every breath we take, every thought we hold, every decision we make, every story we’ve told, we know that you are the Abba of every person on this planet today, and everyone who has ever been born and everyone who will ever live. You are as close to us as the hair on our skin. You are closer still; you are alive within!

Oh, Loving God out there in heaven, and in here – in each of us, and in all of us where we live on earth... you are hallowed, holy, perfectly whole. You are Light and Truth and Beauty and Love, all the things we want to have and want to be sure of every day of our lives. You are the Name of Everything Perfectly Good. And your Spirit fills us with good will wherever we open up.

And we know that your Kingdom – your way of being all powerful and always present in this world and in our lives personally and together – your kin-dom, is happening all the time through the Spirit. It is coming. It is humming with life within and around us, and no amount of crime or terror or ignorance or confusion will ever turn aside the way your heart’s will is beating inside us and through us and around

us everywhere. Oh, yes, times can be dark and pains and sorrows are too real, but you are in those times too, somehow making possibilities of things that are new. So, we can always be renewed as we call out, trusting in the good purposes we find as comfort and direction and motivation every time we honestly lift up in our hearts your name. We ask for heaven's help to live in faithfulness to your goodness here on earth.

Give us bread today; and help us to see that the gift of food or any other good thing is something to be shared with those who have little or none. Show us how to forgive anyone, ourselves included, generously, widely, as fully as the way you forgive our shortcomings or our willful hurts we've done. Let your Spirit guide us away from self-centered attraction to anything that might take over our vision and turn us from keeping your goodness as our source for everything worth having in life. Where we are in danger, whether from thoughts within us, or attacks from outside us, deliver us. For you have the true power of Holy Spirit, and your pure glory is made alive to us and in us by the Spirit so that we might have fullness of life, now and forever!
AMEN

Hymn:

“As the Wind”

[VT #373]

*As the wind song through the trees, as the stirring of the breeze,
so it is with the Spirit of God;
as the heart made strangely warm, as the voice within the storm,
so it is with the Spirit of God.
Never seen, ever known where this wind has blown,
bringing life, bringing pow'r to the world,
as the dancing tongues of fire, as the soul's most deep desire,
so it is with the Spirit of God.*

*As the rainbow after rain, as the hope that's born again,
so it is with the Spirit of God;
as the green in the spring, as a kite on a string,
so it is with the Spirit of God,
making worlds that are new, making peace come true,
bringing gifts, bringing love to the world;
as the rising of the yeast, as the wine at the feast,
so it is with the Spirit of God.*

Scripture:**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15****[Jan Steven]**

15:26 “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. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

16:4b “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7 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. 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; 11 about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. 12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 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. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Reflection:**Learning about the Paraclete****[Jan Steven]**

Laur and I are our grandson Jasper’s child-care providers for a few hours a day – five days a week. This allows his Dad to work and his Mom to recover from major surgery and look after a very young baby with extra needs. Jasper is over three and a half years old and this should be easy peasy. Heck, at one point we had four kids under the age of 10. But back then we had a house with individual rooms for each kid – small as they were – a basement, and a backyard.

Currently, we live in an seniors’ apartment with none of the above. Not only that - because of covid restrictions, we cannot even bring Jasper into our apartment. What this means is that we spend a lot of time looking for parks and then playing in parks. Why looking for parks? Because we cannot go to parks where there is more than a child or two there. Kids can spread covid to each other and then to their parents and grandparents. And so on.

Plus, poor wee Jasper is afraid of other kids. He didn't used to be, but he now associates other children with a disease – covid – that could hurt his mom and dad and baby Walter. I regularly assure Jasper that nothing can happen to him because his granny and grumpa are right there with him.

And of course two minutes after that, one of the two other kids at the park makes a face at Jasper and growls at him. Jasper is reduced to tears and refuses to play in that park any more.

And at what seems to be the next park – we do a buffet of parks some days – I again assure Jasper that as long as we are with him, nothing will happen to him. He is safe. And then he trips and falls headfirst onto the pavement.

And there you have it.

While I can advocate for Jasper to some degree and while I can provide an abundance of comfort, I cannot keep this little boy completely safe. But he can be secure in the complete love and some degree of protection that his grandfather and I offer him.

Our Gospel reading today - from the Gospel of John - is about Jesus trying to explain what the Holy Spirit is and what its role is. And on reading this text and on reading an explanation, I find our grandparenting role comes close to helping me get some insight into this. The Spirit offers deep love and promise - even in the face of pain. Even then, we mortals can feel alone and experience suffering...

The translation of John's Gospel that I used, uses the words Advocate and Spirit of Truth. But in Greek – which I do not know – the word actually used is Paraclete. A rich word with many meanings including:

- Advocate
- Counselor
- Comforter, and
- Intercessor.

William Barclay explains a paracletes is someone called in to help when a person is in trouble or distress or doubt or bewilderment. And Barclay adds that having the Holy Spirit as our Paracletes is even better because, unlike a human, the Spirit is always with us. At our church in AZ, when the pastor lights the candle at the beginning of the service, he says, "We light this candle to remind us that the

Spirit is with us. Was here before we arrived in this place. And will be here with us as we leave...”

In this passage of scripture Jesus is both warning his disciples – and John is warning the early church – that they will be hated because they will be witnesses to the Truth. Witnesses to Jesus. And this was no easy thing. The disciples and members of the early church were being put out of the synagogue. Being put out of the synagogue was huge. You would lose your family and friends, your way of making an income. Everything that hitherto had made you “you” – everything that made your life meaningful and possible – would be gone.

Even worse, Jesus warns his disciples and the early church that a time will come that when a person kills a Christ-follower they will think this is a service to God. I realize that over the last 2,000 years many Christians have had this attitude towards people who are not Christians and that is appalling. But the killing of a person because he or she believes that Jesus is the Christ is no less appalling.

It is hard for these disciples to wrap their minds around the idea that Jesus will soon be leaving them. They have only been together a few short years and have become so deeply attached to Jesus.

It is not the same thing at all, but I think about how we have only known wee Jasper for three years, and if his parents told us that in a little while, we would not be able to see him again – though they would keep in regular touch, we would be crushed. How much more so for these disciples when Jesus is trying to prepare them for his death.

And how hard for them to hear that it is to their advantage if Jesus goes away – when he returns to his Father. Because if he does not, the Holy Spirit will not come in the way it is going to come. Whereas Jesus – having a human body – can only be in one place at a time – the Paraclete can be present with Believers everywhere.

Jesus does not tell them everything that is going to happen to them all at once – because there is only so much we mere mortals can understand and bear.

And at the end of this chapter – and it’s not part of our reading today – Jesus assures his disciples, “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

But what these disciples and early Christians will have, and what we have, is access to the Holy Spirit that will offer them and us comfort and wisdom, and the courage and ability to witness for and about Jesus.

What to make of all this... I will confess that pretty much any text from John's Gospel makes my eyes cross. As I have said before, I am not a theologian. And any description of the Holy Spirit gives me some pause. The disciples could see and touch Jesus. I cannot see and touch the Holy Spirit.

You have hear the statement, "I'm not religious, I'm spiritual." Well, I'm pretty much the opposite, "I'm not spiritual – I'm religious." When I am in a situation of great pain or terrible fear, I'm not one of those people who can "feel the Spirit." Though I know of people who do. My friend Mary in Manitoulin who is undergoing a second round of treatment for breast cancer feels God the Spirit is so close to her in her time of turmoil. She even uses this situation as an opportunity to lovingly witness. I am so not Mary...

But because I believe in Jesus – I believe the claims he made about himself and the teaching he gives – I have to believe that the Holy Spirit really is here. It's here when things are good; it's here when things are not good at all. It's here whether or not I feel it.

What I can feel though, is when people reach out to me and to others with a love that is deeper than what we mortals would normally have. And when people advocate for me and for others far more strongly than they might otherwise. This I how I feel the Spirit.

I feel the Spirit through Project Hope, which you are going to hear more about in the coming weeks. Here is how it works in Kenya, for example. Sheryl Bruggeling from MCC Ontario shared this with me:

Harsh and unpredictable conditions due to climate change weakened Joyce and her husband's harvest, leaving them and their five children hungry and without hope. Through the gifts of Grow Hope supporters, MCC could provide Joyce's family with agriculture training and chickens so that they can now eat three meals a day. "We feel joy because we have everything we need," said Joyce.

I feel the Spirit through Bridge of Hope which you are going to hear more about in the coming weeks.

