

A sermon preached on Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025

at Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, CT by The Rt. Rev. Gordon P. Scruton

Acts 2:1-21. Psalm 104:25-35, 37. John 14:8-27

Several weeks ago, our granddaughter, who is in her mid 20's, told us she had a lot of questions and confusion about the Holy Spirit. She asked if Rebecca and I would be willing to Zoom with her to talk about the Holy Spirit, which we've been doing with joy. Her question makes me wonder: do any of you have questions or confusion about the Holy Spirit?

Of course, there is much more to say about the Holy Spirit than can fit into one sermon and the mystery of the Holy Spirit is beyond what any of us can ever fully know.

Today we are reminded that down through the centuries, Christians have considered Pentecost to be just as important as Christmas and Easter. What made Pentecost so important to our spiritual ancestors?

We hear about the Holy Spirit in the first verses of the Bible, when the Spirit or wind or breath of God moved over the dark chaos and initiated the process of life and all creation. God's Spirit energy, light and love empowered the birthing the universe.

The Bible also tells us that sometimes God's Spirit was given on special occasions to special people...like kings, and prophets, to give them wisdom from God, to guide them, to give them power to accomplish special tasks or missions, like calling Moses through a burning bush to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, and like empowering young David to defeat the powerful giant Goliath.

The angel Gabriel told Mary, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, ...therefore the child you will bear will be holy, the Son of God." When Jesus was baptized, God's Spirit spoke and came upon him like a dove, guiding and empowering him for his ministry of preaching and healing, of dying and rising again. Before he ascended into Heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait and pray together, because God would send the Holy Spirit to guide them, when Jesus was no longer with them.

On the day of Pentecost, God took the same life-giving Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead; the same powerful, loving Spirit that flowed through Jesus as he spoke to people and healed them, ...and poured or breathed that same Spirit into Christ's first followers.

The people in the crowds walking by the house where the disciples were gathered that day wondered, what is that sound like a violent wind? How is it that all of us, from different nations, and tribes, with different languages, different religions, skin colors and cultures all hear these people speaking in our own language, when they can't know all our languages...yet we all understand that they are talking about the mighty works of God. "What does all this mean?"

Some people in the crowd made snide dismissive comments...oh their just drunken fools. Ignore them. This response reminds us that some people both then and now, are not able to recognize God's Spirit in extraordinary events like Pentecost and the life and teaching of Jesus. They seem to be either blind, too busy or uninterested.

Then Peter, not threatened by their comments, but inspired by the Spirit began to speak to the crowd. Peter had not imagined this kind of Wind/Spirit experience before it happened. But he was a good Jewish man of the time, who had spent the last 3 years with Jesus, and had read, studied and memorized many passages of the Jewish Scripture throughout his life. Because of his years of regular Scripture reading and synagogue worship, in this moment, the Spirit brought to his mind what the prophet Joel had said which might help the crowds understand what was happening. Joel said, “In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ...I will speak to young people and old people, to rich and poor, to men and women....and then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Do you see the big cosmic vision the Spirit inspired Joel to write and Peter to quote? I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people...not just Jewish or Christian or any one religion, and on everyone, regardless of how society valued or did not value them...the Spirit would be poured out on both men and women, on people of all ages, on rich and poor people, on people who come from different nations, speak different languages and have many colors of skin and cultures. God’s vision is for all people to live with loving respect and harmony with God’s Spirit and with everyone else on the planet, and even with the earth and the animals, with the entire cosmos.

Jesus proclaimed this same vision that the Spirit gave Joel when he said several times in his teaching that the heart of God’s purpose for creating the human race was to create a global community where all people live in loving harmony with God and all our neighbors, including our enemies, including the whole Creation.

Let’s pause for a moment to let this awesome vision sink in. Can you imagine God’s Spirit’s stunning positive vision for the world becoming reality? When we glimpse this vision...it makes it excruciatingly painful to think of how far from this ideal we human beings have chosen to live down through history,... and painful to look at how we human beings are speaking and acting with each other at this time in our nation and world. How can we not weep at how far we are from the vision God’s Spirit created us to live?

We might ask, why have we strayed or not been able to sustain this Kingdom of God vision, this quality of loving relationships down through the centuries, except perhaps in small pockets of people around the world for short periods of time?

The Bible speaks from the beginning about the voices of temptation that try to lure us away from listening to the voice of the Spirit of God and instead to listen to and follow voices that tempt us to be self-focused, to be driven by greed for more money, more power, more control for ourselves without concern for God’s Kingdom vision for the well being of all people and creation. Self-focused greed demands that we get more at the expense of others, by devaluing, disrespecting, even taking from others the very things they need to survive, like food, water, health care, homes in which to live in safety, fulfilling work to help them live and serve others, creative mutually supportive communities. The Bible talks about how the world, the flesh and the devil tempt all of us to ignore and turn our back on both the vision and the lifegiving Spirit-breath of God that we breath every moment.

We human beings seem to stop listening to and following the voice of God’s Spirit and instead, listen to and addictively follow false voices, like Adam and Eve did, choosing to act on the serpent’s lies about what is important and true, to listen to the self-serving voice of greed... like the tempter’s words to Adam and Eve: if you follow me, I will make you great, like God. God had spoken to Adam and Eve about God’s purpose for creating them, to of living in harmony with God and all creation.

But they were tempted to follow a different path. And the pattern has been repeated throughout history.

What is amazing about this tragic story is that the Spirit of God is relentless. God never gives up on the people God created, in spite of our constant rejection of God's way. And God's Spirit never gives up on the vision God has for how to live in loving harmony God and with all that God created.

I wonder, on this Pentecost, at this moment in our personal and global history, what might the Spirit want to say to us and to all people around the world?

I would love for us to sit together to talk and pray about this question over a period of time, because the Spirit is still alive and inviting us to live the Jesus way of life, the vision of God's Kingdom.

A few weeks ago, Rose referred in her homily to a profound book titled: **The Patient Ferment of the Early Church**. It outlines how, after Pentecost, the followers of Jesus tried to follow the guidance of the Spirit and live the Jesus way of life in the powerful and pagan Roman Empire and its way of life which contradicted the Jesus Way. Within their little house churches, and in their daily interactions with Roman society, they practiced talking about and living the Jesus vision of the loving Kingdom of God. They kept asking the Spirit for guidance and through all the threatening challenges they faced, the Spirit made them remarkable examples of loving everyone, caring for the needy and outcasts that were marginalized by Roman society. They were poor, yet they sacrificed to care for others in need. And they were joyful, singing communities seeking to include people of all races and nations, men and women, children and adults, rich and poor, educated and less educated. They developed spiritual practices and little ways of prayer that helped them stay connected with the Spirit of Jesus who lived within them when they got up in the morning, as they lived through the day and as they went to bed at night. They gathered to have meals together, to reflect on the Scriptures and wrestle together to understand what the Spirit might be calling them to be and do next. They organized to care for the people in need around them, regardless of who they were.

We are doing many of these things in our little parish now. We have around 30 people every week who meet in the various small groups in our parish to seek the help of the Spirit and Scripture, seeking to learn together how the Spirit is calling us to think, speak and act with love like Jesus at this time and place. We've organized, given and acted to help many needy people around us, regardless of who they are.

And I wonder, is the Spirit inviting us personally and as a congregation to be even more intentional about talking and praying together, listening for any fresh guidance the Spirit might be giving us at this time? We are praying and exploring whether and how the Spirit might want us to make the parish hall more accessible. How do we recognize what the Spirit is saying to us about this possibility? Are there other little steps the Spirit might be inviting us to take? Do some of us sense a call from the Spirit to initiate some additional way of embodying the Spirit's vision of loving service and companionship with marginalized and needy people around us? Are we being called to pray daily for God to help us be more aware of and responsive to the Holy Spirit who dwells within in us and to the needs of people around us and around the world? What role is the Spirit inviting us to play in this time of great turmoil and anxiety so that God's Kingdom may come and God's will be done through us?

Let's close our eyes and be still with God for a moment together...

First, let's thank God for giving the Spirit to dwell within each of us, in this congregation and in people all over this community, nation and world. Let's thank God for the blessings we have all received from the Spirit...

Then let's ask, what might the Spirit be saying to you personally and to our congregation right now....

Often, it takes time to discover and follow the guidance of the Spirit. So, every day this week, when and how will you take a few moments of quiet to both thank the Spirit for dwelling in you, in every breath you take...and then asking what the Spirit is calling you to be and do in that one day...and finally asking the Spirit to come to all the hurting, broken people and places around the world with God's gift of healing love and peace...

Let's close by singing together the refrain we sang together in our first hymn today. Let's sing the refrain 2 times: Come Lord Jesus, send us your spirit, renew the face of the earth...