

NEW TESTAMENT READING: Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." ¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷'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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

EPISTLE READING: Romans 8:22-26

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

“The Paraclete”

One of my most favorite and wise professors, Rev. KC Ptomey, once said that *“the name by which we call someone has much to do with how we then relate to them”*. He was warning us of the use of derogatory names, but it is a true statement in a positive context as well. *“The name by which we call someone has much to do with how we then relate to them.”*

Consider, for example, the name that John uses for the Holy Spirit, the main character in today’s text, that is, “Paraclete”. It’s a name that comes from the Greek, *Parakletos*, meaning, *“One who comes alongside”*. We relate to the “One who comes alongside” in many and varied ways. Some of these ways were mentioned in the Litany this morning. Maybe the way that we we first think of is as Comforter! Yes, we relate to the Paraclete as Comforter. So often in our times of trial, when life has brought us to our very lowest, when we are most fearful, most anxious or traumatized, it is the Spirit of the Living God who surrounds us with a very real sense of presence to console, uplift and accompany. It is the Paraclete who comes ever so gently, time and time again, to remind us by a sensation of warmth, a quiet whisper or simply an unexplainable peace, that we are not alone, that we are, and forever will be, safe in God’s care.

Many years ago, when our oldest son, Joel, was probably about 3 yr old, an awesome, but pretty typical, spring rainstorm came up in Georgia where we were living. Joel was really frightened at the sound of the thunder and heavy rain, in fact, he was terrified. Our little house had a front porch and a screen on the outer front door. For some reason, for some reason, don’t know why it occurred to me to open the inner door and sit cross-legged on the floor in front of the screen door. I put Joel on my lap and held my arms around him. We sat silently together, inside the house, safe and dry, and just took in the storm. We smelled the ozone in the air. The wind blew through the house and our hair flew around. The rain pounded the sidewalk, beyond the porch, and its mist bounced back on our faces. We heard the rushing air move the tall trees and bushes, the occasional sound of thunder, and we watched the lightning in the distant sky. Somehow, among all this awesomeness, Joel became calm. His breathing slowed and deepened. Looking back, I think that with each of our breaths, we were breathing

God in and out. The Spirit came that day... We sat there a long time. Joel, now 36, tells me he still loves rainstorms, and that he is teaching his little son to appreciate them too.

Yes, the Spirit comes alongside us as the Comforter. But also, as the Advocate. “The Spirit,” Jesus said, “he leaves with us to defend, counsel, and intercede on our behalf, testifying as does a lawyer in court, seeking justice and compassion, speaking when we are too weak or cannot find the words” In Romans, Paul says, “*The Spirit prays for us with groaning too deep for words*”. *Have you ever witnessed someone who is in the midst of losing something or everything so dear to them, or someone who is the victim of another’s persecution? Have you found them unable to make adequate response because they are overwhelmed by the depth of the loss or the strength of their opponent, maybe their brain was too clouded with fear? If you have you, like me, likely, found words to come to you from somewhere, words that you didn’t think you even had, came tumbling out of your mouth in their support or defense. Well, that was the Holy Spirit coming alongside you as Advocate to voice for your deepest needs.*

Comforter, Advocate. For sure. But we dare not stop there with the ways that the Holy Spirit comes alongside, because when we read the Pentecost text, we see the Paraclete to act more like what David Lose calls a *Provocateur*, One who shakes things up and gets us moving!¹ There they were, the followers of Jesus, together in one place, in an upper room in Jerusalem, when they heard a “holy hurricane headed their way”.² Some have said it was the *Ruah*...the breath of God that blew over the waters when God created the earth. It was a violent, powerful rush of air. Barbara Brown Taylor imagines it this way, “*When Jesus let go of his last breath on the cross, it hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on the earth. It was such pungent breath---so full of passion, so full of LIFE---that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and in volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through the house on the day of Pentecost. She goes on, “Before any of them could defend themselves, that mighty wind had blown through it all, striking sparks that burst into flames above their heads, and they were filled up with it---every one of them was filled up with it---every one of them was filled to the gills with God’s own breath. Then*

¹David Lose. Pentecost. In the Meantime <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/pentecost-b-come-alongside-holy-spirit/> (accessed 5-21-15)

² Barbara Brown Taylor. Sermon. “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.” In: Home by Another Way.(Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999),142-8.

something clamped down on them and the air came out of them in languages they did not even know they knew. Like a room full of bagpipes all going at once, they set up such a racket that they drew a crowd. People from all over, who were in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost, came leaning in the windows and pushing through the doors, surprised to hear someone speaking their own language so far from home. Parthians expected to see Parthians. Libyans expected to see Libyans. But what they saw instead were just a bunch of Galileans---all of them going on and on about God's mighty acts like a bunch of Ph.D.s in middle eastern languages.”³

Friends, by the day's end over 3000 people had been baptized. Wow! It's understandable why the Day of Pentecost has been called the birthday of the church. And not only was the church born, but people were changed. Believers found they could do things they never knew they could do. Confidence was born out of fear and boldness emerged out of timidity. Purpose and direction became clear. Uneducated disciples began to preach with eloquence and heal the sick through the laying on of hands. They'd been shook up, undone. Their lives uprooted, souls transformed. And the One who comes alongside was behind it all. The Paraclete was there then as now to prompt, prod, even provoke them with courage and strength for the work.

(Pause) Brothers and sisters, did you know that the prayer said in the Litany this morning, “*Holy Spirit, come change us as you move in our midst*”, is one that we have regularly and fervently lifted together in this church for 9 ½ years now. We have said it in different languages; we have sung it. In a way it has become our identifying prayer. And, and, and we have witnessed it be powerfully answered in more ways than I can begin to recount. Suffice it to say that we have had things come our way which we've needed but that we could not otherwise afford...via donations, grants or greatly reduced costs. Staff members have simply fallen from heaven to us when we've needed them most. We've witnessed amazing growth...physical and spiritual. As of late, after some loss during COVID, we have been blessed to welcome many beautiful new members from Africa, and an online congregation too who have returned the FPC embrace with joy and faithful hearts. Our reputation of being the most welcoming, warm and accepting of churches has only enlarged! Sometimes at our fellowship events when everyone is laughing and children are running to and fro, or when we're together

³ Ibid.

working hard on one of our mission projects, or when I'm introducing a newly baptized baby to their new family or when a new elder is on fire for their work, I can feel the energy of the Spirit almost palpable in the air. Or when the Sanctuary is lit up with music or when it's pin quiet in prayer or when a Bible study class is buzzing with questions from interested students, when letters are received from members who've moved who still participating with us online, or when the Session takes a risk that they thought they didn't have the courage to take, it is then that I feel the presence of the Spirit with us, moving us, changing, proding us to conspire to be the people that God in the world.

Friends, the name, Paraclete, DOES has much to do with how we think about and relate with the Spirit ... as Comforter, as Advocate, as Provocateur. So, I send you today with a few questions to ponderIs there a deep pain or fear or trauma for which you need receive consolation? Do you need to hear a voice speaking for you or empowering you to speak for someone else? Is there a task you feel takes greater courage or skill, or effort than you think you have? Are you being urged to dive into a deeper study of Scripture? Do you need to invest more in yourself, to stand on the front porch of your heart and breathe God in and out deeply? Well, if any of these are true, you need remember that on a day in an upper room in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago, a rush of air, a breath, was set loose in the world. It was so full of love and passion and life that it could not simply dissipate but it grew in strength and volume until it now comes alongside each of us to give us what we so deeply need. For this breath is the Spirit of our Living God, brothers and sisters. It is the Holy Spirit. It is the Paraclete. And the Paraclete is here for you, closer than your very breath, tomorrow and always.

To God be the glory. Amen