

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid

A Sermon for the Day of Pentecost, Year B | Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

St. Alban's Church, Sinking Spring, PA

May 20th 2018

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today marks our celebration of the feast of Pentecost, the day in which the Apostles were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the day to which we look to see the beginnings of the Church as we have come to know it. Often the beginning of any story will, in some way, set the tone for what is to come afterwards, even if in subtle or unnoticeable ways. If you think about your favorite book or movie, it will probably ring true -- the opening lines or scenes will likely have something to do with the overall scope of the plot. Pentecost and the Early Church are no different -- Christians have been studying these first moments of the Christian faith since it began, looking to this moment of Pentecost and then onward to the Apostles' teaching, continuing with the breaking of bread and the prayers, and reading from St. Paul's letters to better understand how we might live into this holy calling as children of God.

And yet, to best understand the Early Church, we must look back even further, to the very beginning of scripture and the book of Genesis, and to the creation of all things. We might recall that, when God made anything in Genesis, it was described as "good," and God's role as creator might seem like fairly simple foreshadowing of the power, authority, and goodness of God throughout the rest of scripture. But before people, before plants, before animals, even before light, there are two essential things that are in the midst of this infant creation:

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters."

These familiar words are the beginning of our story, the beginning of the story of God and, soon thereafter, the beginning of the story of the people of God. Yet just before God's people are created, and long before the day of Pentecost, *water and spirit* were vital to creation, and they are essential to each of us, as well. These themes of water and spirit come up again and again through scripture—from the great flood of Noah, to the Exodus and the parting of the Red Sea; from the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River to the baptisms here, today, in this place -- the Spirit is present as the movement of God, from the beginning and even to this very moment.

Each of those examples contain their own beginnings -- the beginning of God's covenant after the flood; the beginning of Israel's redemption from Egypt; the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry; and in each baptism in the Church today, the beginning of being sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

It is no surprise, then, that the Church was created with and continues to be increased through water and the Spirit. As we've heard, on the first Pentecost, the disciples are standing around, and the Spirit is lurking in their midst, ready to create something great within them. At this moment, they, like the void in Genesis, are formless in that they are unclear as to what happens next. Their Lord has ascended from their sight, and while they worshipped and gave thanks to God for this wondrous act, they were sort of stuck, waiting, for this Advocate that was to come, that was promised to them by Jesus. And in an instant, it appears like wind and fire, overcoming the disciples by its power, all the while beginning to empower them for the work and ministry that was ahead of them.

This is the movement of God, first over the waters, then poured out like water upon all flesh, like the first baptisms of the Early Church, blessed by water and Spirit.

Each plays its part, of course. Water sustains us and practically defines much of what we do: we drink it, we bathe in it, we use it to help grow food, our bodies are full of it, and we cannot survive very long without it. The Spirit works in similar ways -- St. Paul writes that it activates the gifts God has given us, that it helps us when we are weak, and gives voice to our prayer when our own words simply won't come. Jesus describes it as the Spirit of truth, the One who will

continue to speak as he does, who will fill the sorrow of our hearts, who will give the living waters that will flow from our very selves. If water surrounds the necessities of our bodies, so the Spirit gives life to the necessities of our souls, coming to us as life-giving water, as the breath of God that supports us, as the fire that energizes and purifies us, and as love that binds us together in Christ's body.

Today is especially a day when we give thanks for the gift of the Spirit as we baptize Ethan and Rivers, because for them, today marks a beginning, a day in which, as the Psalmist declares, those who receive the Spirit of God are created anew, and through them, so God renews the face of the earth. They will be baptized by water and the Spirit, and through them we pray that even the glory of God might be seen in their joy, when they laugh, when they cry, in their movements, and all through their young lives.

But the Holy Spirit is not just at work when Christians are baptized. The Spirit is influencing the world at all times and in all places. As the Holy Spirit empowered the Apostles to continue in Christ's ministry and teachings so long ago, so the Spirit aids us as we work to live like Jesus. We have only to seek out the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, beckoning the Spirit to guide our efforts.

So let us not simply relegate the Holy Spirit to the beginnings we've mentioned or to this day of Pentecost. Like St. Peter remembering the prophet Joel's words, let us remember that we are in these last days, that God's Spirit is poured out onto us specifically on certain days but remains with us every day of our lives. Let us remember that water and Spirit are linked from the beginning, and that when we see each of them in the world, know them to be signs of when the Spirit first was given to you.

For certainly, our lives would be very different if each time we encountered water and the Spirit we remembered those vows we made at our Baptism -- the next time you have a glass of water, or wash your hands, or take a shower, or get caught in the rain, or do anything else with water, remember that the people of God have been saved through water and been made holy with water; remember the feeling Ethan, Rivers, and their families will experience; and remember that we, too, are baptized people, having made holy vows and having been sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.

And the next time you feel the wind brush up against you on a breezy Spring day, or huddle close to the light and heat of a bonfire in Autumn, or when you feel the faintest breath of a loved one whisper against your skin, remember that the Spirit of God comes as wind, fire, and breath, and is present with you now and always.

So come -- come, Holy Spirit!

Come as the water of life who sanctifies, revives, and renews us when we are thirsty.

Come as the fire who kindles our hearts that we may be energized for ministry in the world.

Come as the gift who activates and empowers us in our ministry to take our place in the body of Christ.

Come as love and fill us each with the grace of your presence -- guiding us, forming us, and strengthening us in all that we do.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Amen.