

Begin From Where You Are 2024
 Acts 1:4-8 John 15:26-27, 16:3-13

Acts 1:4-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 15:26-27, 16:4-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

"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. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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.

I was just 18 when my parents first dropped me off for college,
 a freshman, far across the state of Virginia, a long way from home,
 and feeling a bit anxious and timid as I watched them drive away.

I realized even then, that it marked an end to my childhood ---
 of my parents always being there, present to comfort me,
 to nurture and care for me, to provide and protect me,
 to teach, guide, direct and be responsible for me...

**... for all of that would change and never be the same again
 as I was on the verge of becoming a responsible adult.**

For three years his disciples have shared the journey with Jesus.
 They got to hear his wonderful wisdom, parables and teaching.
 They have seen his miracles happen right in front of them,
 healing the blind, walking on water, raising the dead,
 feeding the multitudes, and welcoming the outcasts,
but mostly, they felt his love and a sense of God's mission.

Can you imagine, what an amazing and incredible experience,
what an adventure being a disciple of Jesus must have been,
to have spent those three years instructed and blessed
in the very presence and inspiration of Jesus Christ?

But that night, gathered with them in the Upper Room,
Jesus had told them that he would be leaving them,
that he would be betrayed into the hands of sinners to die,
and so, **they were deeply distressed and confused.**

That night in the Upper Room with his disciples,
Jesus was trying to prepare them for what was coming.
It was that night when Jesus would be betrayed and arrested,
and his last words of teaching and hope addressed to his disciples.

The message and assurance that Jesus gave the disciples that night,
that though he was leaving them, yet he was not abandoning them,
for through the Advocate – the Holy Spirit,
he would still be with them, wherever they went,
to see them through all of life's trials and storms.

Jesus was promising the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
vs. 15:26 and 16:13,

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.

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.

I want to be very clear and simple concerning the Holy Spirit.

God the Father, sent Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was
God in human flesh to teach and reveal the truth of God,
in order to fulfill God's will and God's purpose,
which is the healing and salvation of humankind
from the terrible consequences of sin & death.

Today we celebrate 'Pentecost', the church's birthday,
but it is far more than just some long ago historical event.

The true miracle of Pentecost is that once again, **God happened.**
We read in Acts about the early Christian church that was on fire,
and their boldness and courage overcame even the Roman Empire,
for when God sends forth his Spirit amazing things will happen,
God's Spirit, bringing hope, renewal, redemption & new life.

Pentecost is an appropriate time for us to reflect and reconsider,
the often forgotten or ignored third person of the Holy Trinity,
who is the on-going power and gracious presence of the Lord
who guides & enables the Church to do ministry, even today.

As it's explained in the Gospel, John 16:7,

... 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.

Jesus of Nazareth had been physically limited in time and place.

He could only be in one location at a time,
but not so with the Holy Spirit, 'the Advocate' ...

... who is the unlimited presence of God always with us, guiding us,
who reveals the truth about God, God's grace and saving purpose,
and through whom we experience God's love, guidance & healing.

The Holy Spirit is **the infinite presence of God** always everywhere,
as Jesus explained, continuing the work and ministry of Jesus
through the faithful mission and ministry of the Church.

Then as Jesus explained further, vs. 8-11,

And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:
about sin, because they do not believe in me; **about righteousness**, because I am going to the Father and
you will see me no longer; **about judgment**, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

The promise is that the "Advocate", the Holy Spirit is coming,

in the Greek, literally, 'one who stands beside in support of you',
which means to us, the one who will continue the ministry,
the work, the cleansing and healing presence of Jesus,
and who through the Church brings joy, renewal & hope.

As Jesus explained, the Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ,
and will be teaching and reminding the disciples
of all that Jesus had done and taught them, vs. 12-13,

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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.

That is the power of Pentecost, **God's love & presence always with us.**

And this is the very important truth for us today,
that just as the Spirit transformed, revised and reformed,
the defeated, disappointed, frightened disciples in hiding
- into bold and courageous persons of faith,
on fire empowered to proclaim to good news,
so too, that is the same hopeful promise and powerful presence
of transforming & healing power & potential **available to us.**

The Holy Spirit is the presence of Jesus Christ in the present,
who guides and strengthens and supports us to live as Christians
even amid all the changing complexities of our modern world.

It is by the power, presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit

that our Christian hope, joy and peace can be vibrant and alive,
and that we have a yearning and hunger for our faith
and our relationship with God **to grow ever deeper.**

It is by the Holy Spirit that we are led, blessed and directed
in the continuing process of transforming us from inside out
as over time our lives become closer aligned with Christ
as the Holy Spirit guides our response to God's grace.

The Bible, God's Word, is already written and its contents complete.
Nevertheless, God isn't finished, but continues to speak & direct
through the continuing person and presence of the Holy Spirit.
It is the Holy Spirit who opens the truth of Scripture to us.

I remember a time I was taking Scripture and prayer more seriously.
It was long before I began seminary & studying to become a pastor.
I was trying to understand a text that seemed to contradict
another biblical passage that I had just read recently.

I thought long and hard, and was trying to make sense of it,
trying to reconcile the two biblical texts, but I could not.

And then in prayer, writing and describing my questioning to God,
my words chosen and trying to explain my troubled confusion,
it came like an unexpected flash,
an incredible experience of insight, at once I could see it.

Suddenly the two texts together and made perfect sense to me,
and combined, they took me to a much deeper understanding ...
... which was the Holy Spirit inspiring, opening up God's word to me.

I've reread that prayer several times. I still feel the Spirit,
and it's still an amazing experience of grace and blessings,
to see again that moment of the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

The best way I know to explain the experience of the Holy Spirit,
goes back to before New Mexico when I used to enjoy sailing,
or, "**the skillful pleasure of dancing with the wind on water.**"

Unlike a rowboat powered with oars, or a powerboat with fuel,
the quiet and peaceful joy and challenge of sailing,
is setting the sails so that they catch the wind,
which provides the power for moving the sailboat.
Since nothing can be done that will change or produce more wind,
all you can do is follow the wind and set your sails to catch it.

Surely the Church of Jesus Christ is something like that.
It's not though our own efforts, hard work or good rowing,
but by the faithfulness of God that builds up the Church ...
... as it's written in **Psalm 127:1** and **Jeremiah 29:11**,

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, **to give you a future with hope.**

The Church is meant to be God-powered, not human effort-powered.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church of Jesus Christ,
and ever since then, the call and task of the Church
has been to set sail and catch the Holy Spirit-wind...
... which empowers the Church and sets its direction and mission.

Like a sailboat with **a billowed spinnaker gliding across the water,**
may our sails be caught by the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit,
for there is nothing more meaningful, fulfilling & satisfying
than using well the unique gifts God has entrusted to each
to make a positive difference in the life of someone else.

Faithfulness begins by living our lives well **right where we are,**
so that our lives are worthy of the grace we have received...
... for our God **is so awesome,** and the breadth of his love **is so broad,**
that he stoops down to our feeble human traits & particularities.

That means our diverse & unique gifts are expressions of God's grace,
and are not just for our own pleasure or our sense of satisfaction,
but are actually God's gifts **to the community of faith**
intended to flow unimpeded and creatively through us.

Christ has set us all free to participate in God's grace & mission,
for the Church of Jesus Christ is called and equipped to be
a visible and living representation of Christ to this world,
and that by serving together well, somehow we manage
to set our sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit.

The Acts passage we read came after the trauma of the crucifixion,
but that wasn't the end.
When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was incredible,
but that wasn't the end, Jesus was still with them.

Over the next forty days after his Easter appearances,
Jesus had taught and explained many things to them
that hadn't made much sense before his resurrection, vs. 6,
So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

The disciples were still looking for the end of Roman occupation,
and for the nation of Israel to be back to the way it had been before...
... so when are things finally going to be restored? vs. 7-8

Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Don't be distracted by the finite things of this world, for we are
to bear witness, to proclaim the life & teachings of Jesus Christ,
that is our mission and purpose, that's why the Church exists,
to proclaim God's promises, the joy & peace our God intends,
and every aspect of our lives, conscious of the Holy Spirit.

But notice, Jesus instructs the disciples to stay in Jerusalem
and wait for the Holy Spirit. Don't try to do this on your own,
but only as you seek and follow the Holy Spirit
can our mission be accomplished and fulfilled...
...as Jesus warns in John 15, "apart from me, you can do nothing."

Our call is not something of our own efforts, works or achievement,
but grace brings us into a cooperative and intimate relationship
in which the Holy Spirit empowers us, accomplishing
God's will & purpose by working in us and through us.

God invites us to participate and share in his work and purpose,
as we trust God to produce the perfect results that he desires,
as we dare to ask,
What is God up to, and how can I best cooperate with that?

In our world, broken, corrupt, self-destructive and hurting,
we are called and we are equipped by God's Holy Spirit to serve,
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in
Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth...When the Spirit of truth comes, he
will guide you into all the truth...

Today we are here to celebrate God's gift and blessing, our rebirth,
and that we are part of something special, awesome and wonderful,
for God is still very much blessing and still hard at work,
still seeking the lost and transforming human lives,
guiding & empowering us to build beyond what we are.