

Pentecost 2019  
June 9, 2019

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father, our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who lives in, with, and among us. Amen.

Happy Pentecost!

Today we celebrate the giving of the Holy Spirit. Today we celebrate that after Jesus ascended back into heaven, he kept his promise to always be with us by giving us the Holy Spirit.

Today we celebrate that, through the Holy Spirit, no matter where we go or what we do, God is with us, supporting us and loving us, forgiving us and empowering us.

God is with us always. And that's huge!

God is not far away and distant from us. No. God is right here among us.

And not only is God physically present here among us, but God is also always with us in the sense that God is always on our side. When we say God is with us, we also mean that God is for us, and that's why Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the advocate.

The Holy Spirit is God with us and for us. The Holy Spirit is our very own cheerleader who encourages us and goes to bat for us. And today we celebrate that gift.

In the Gospel reading for today, Philip tells Jesus, "show us the Father and we will be satisfied." You can bet that Jesus just wants to bang his head against the wall. "Philip, I am the Father. We are one. When you see me you see the Father. When you see me and remember all that I have done, you see God. In me, you see God, the one who created you and loves you unconditionally."

But, Jesus doesn't just leave it there, with the disciples being satisfied in knowing who God is. Satisfaction isn't enough. Jesus takes it a step further. He says, "Those who believe in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, they will do greater works than these, because the Holy Spirit will be with you."

Jesus ministry is not about people just being satisfied and complacent with knowing God loves them. "Oh – that's who God is? God is love. That's nice."

No. It's much bigger than that!

God sends the Holy Spirit to us to continue Jesus' work. God's work, which needs to be done in the flesh, because we are fleshy. So, the Holy Spirit is sent to make us the body of Christ in the world, a real life presence in the world.

As an individual, Jesus could only do so much. After all, one person can only go so far, but together we can transform the world. We can bring resurrection to the entire world – together.

It's like the old camp song, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going..." Or the old shampoo commercial where one person told one person who told one person and so on and so on and so on. Do you remember that commercial? It started with the one lady, and then there were 2 of her, then 4 of her, then 16 of her and so on and so on and son on.

And so the Church started with John telling Andrew about Jesus. Andrew told Simon Peter, his brother, about Jesus. Then Jesus called Philip who found his friend Nathanael. And then before long there was 12 of them – the apostles. At the crucifixion they lost Judas, but after the resurrection they picked up Matthias.

In Jerusalem, 1,986 years ago, there were 12 apostles, those sent out to share the good news, and today the Church has grown to include over 2 billion people all over the world.

Two billion people who are deployed all over the world to proclaim the resurrection in their words and actions. To proclaim that life is stronger than death. That God loves all of us and will never give up on us. That forgiveness brings healing. That unconditional love destroys guilt and shame. That relationships bring peace to the world.

The Holy Spirit is in us to bring that good news to the entire world. Jesus couldn't do it on his own, so he sends all of us out with the Holy Spirit to continue his work for the sake of the world.

And because the Holy Spirit is within us, we can take Jesus ministry and run with it. We can take it into every little nook and cranny we find ourselves, because it goes with us inside of us. It is the fire that is within us.

So, when we go to the store, we can do Jesus' ministry by smiling at strangers, holding the door for others, helping someone find their car in the parking lot, talking nicely to the sales clerk, and saying please and thank you.

We can call friends and family members who are isolated and let them know we are thinking of them. Or, if they have a hard time hearing, we can send them a card or a letter. Being all alone is the worst thing that can happen to a person. Alone, we get depressed. That's why relationships are so important.

At school or work, we can take the time and make the effort to check in with our classmates or co-workers to see how they are doing. Small talk is a great way to let people know they matter.

If we're exiting the highway and come across someone asking for money, we can smile at them and wave. We don't even have to give them anything. Just looking them in the eye and saying hello lets them know that they are valuable.

And when people are struggling for a fair shake in the world, we can stand beside them and encourage them to speak their truth. We can be there to prop them up and support them, without taking their voice away from them.

When someone is crying, we can put an arm around them and just listen to them. Often just being there is enough.

And when someone is celebrating a milestone, we can be there too cheering them on and wishing them the best.

There are a ton of things we can do to let others know that they are valued and beloved. And that's what it all really comes down to. It's a ministry of letting people know that they are not alone and they are loved unconditionally by the one who created them out of love in the first place.

That's Jesus ministry. That is why he was born in Bethlehem, hung out in Galilee, and was killed and resurrected in Jerusalem. He did all of that to assure us that God is with us, and so after he ascended into heaven, he sent the Advocate, the Holy Spirit to be in, with, and among us, constantly reminding us of that good news.

There is a story of a man from California going to Pennsylvania Amish country. The tourist stopped an Amish farmer and asked him if he were a Christian. The man didn't answer yes or no. What he told the tourist was that he needed to go ask his neighbors. They can tell the man whether or not he is a Christian.

Yes – they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes – they'll know we are Christians by our love.

And love isn't just warm fuzzy feelings. Love is action. Love is what we do for one another. Love is caring about others and their wellbeing, and making sacrifices for their welfare. It's about putting other people's needs above our own wants.

And so, Christianity isn't just believing. Christianity is also action. Christianity is us doing Jesus' ministry of sharing God's love here and now, which we are enabled to do through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sends us forth to love as we have been loved.

Jesus' ministry is fleshy. Jesus came in the flesh, because it's really hard to know God's love for us when God seems to be far away and aloof. That fleshy ministry continues today in us. Through the Holy Spirit, we are the hands, feet, and voice of Christ who proclaim that God is with us and for us.

And so, God uses us in all of our uniqueness to bring God's peace into the world – every little bit of it. So, never be ashamed of how you are different from everyone else. Celebrate it, because God can and will use it to let everyone else know that God's love is unconditional.

At seminary, everyone had ideals of who pastors should be – how they should look and act. Our professors were quick to remind us that it takes all kinds to share the good news. As one professor often quoted, “if God can use Balaam's ass, God can use anyone.” And God does.

Through the Holy Spirit working in each one of us, God's will will be done, which is to bring peace to all the Earth.

Thanks be to God! Amen.