

Year C Pentecost John 14 vv8 to 17, 25 to 27

In Luke's account of the giving of the Holy Spirit that we hear in Acts, it is a very big production – a miracle on two fronts...people are speaking in languages they do not know, and people are hearing foreign languages sounding like their own native tongue. What could be a grating cacophony of noise is, instead a beautiful symphony. Thousands of people profess their faith in Christ through this miracle of the Holy Spirit and are baptized – baptized into the oneness of God, made children of God, always having this active presence of the Spirit within them from then on. But let's put aside all of this brilliance of tongues of fire, speaking in foreign languages, thousands being saved, and Peter's brave and confident speech...and let's catch up with Peter, instead, in the questioning and confusion and dismay of John's Gospel story.

We are, once again, lounging with Jesus and the disciples at their last meal together. But "lounging" makes it sound like this is a joyful and relaxed occasion. We join the disciples today as their hearts are troubled. Jesus has been, throughout this final evening with them, talking with his disciples – again and again – about three major points: He is leaving. They are staying. The Holy Spirit will be with them to help them continue his work.

Again and again, his disciples are getting stuck on point #1 – he is leaving. They don't want him to leave. He is their teacher. He is their friend. They're just getting started on spreading the good news that Jesus is the messiah, things are changing, the perfection of God's kingdom is getting closer. Why would he leave now?

In various ways, the disciples keep bringing the conversation back to the whole "leaving" thing. Where are you going? Why can't we follow now? Jesus tells them that they know the way to where he is going and Thomas says, "We don't know

where you're going so how on earth can we know the way?" Jesus tells them he is the way. To know him is to know both the way to the destination and to know the destination itself because the destination is the oneness with God Jesus has been telling them about over and over.

So now it's Philip's turn to bring the conversation back to "you're leaving us and we don't want that." Philip says to Jesus, "You keep talking about us knowing the Father. If you must leave us, at least show us the Father you keep talking about. Give us something to hold on to." We can tell by Jesus' response that this frustrates him. Perhaps he wondered if his disciples had been listening to him and watching anything he did over the past few years with them. He has been showing them the Father, is his exasperated reply.

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father," (John 14:9) Jesus tells them...again. This is an echo of John's words written at the beginning of his Gospel, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18). "Jesus lives, lays down his life, and picks it up again, all in order to make God known. Why? Because humanity cannot be in relationship with One whom they do not know" (Mary Hinkle Shore, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)).

As Jesus emphasizes for them once more that he and his Father are one, this quickly turns into his comforting of his beloved disciples whom he is about to leave. He reassures them that he will ask the Father to send to them another Advocate who will be with them forever. Jesus has been their advocate with the Father and, now, this other Advocate – the Holy Spirit – will guide them and teach them as well as remind them of all that he has already said to them. He is leaving them with his peace, he tells them. By giving to them the gift of his presence through the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives to his disciples the peace that the world cannot give, the peace that

eases troubled hearts. John makes this connection between God's peace and God's Spirit incredibly obvious for us by showing to us the scene in which Jesus does give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. They are huddled in fear in the upper room, certain that Jesus is dead and gone – he has left them as he said he would. They are afraid that the Jewish authorities may torture or kill them as well – making examples of them to squash any rumblings of a revolution. Frightened, feeling abandoned and unsure of what to do next, **this** is when Jesus comes to them. Peace be with you, he says, and he breathes on them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God's peace, God's love, and the deep and abiding joy of, as Mother Teresa has said, of being "in God, surrounded and encompassed by God, swimming in God" (p.11 of *Mother Teresa Her Essential Wisdom*) is given to us in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Lutheran pastor, Ray LeBlanc explains that our experience of the Holy Spirit is very much like our experience of wearing a well-fitting pair of eyeglasses. "The only time we really look *at* them is when we're looking *for* them. Glasses are not to be seen, they are to be seen *through*. They are functioning best when we don't notice them. We examine them to remove the specks and smears that draw attention to the glasses themselves. But when they're sitting comfortably on our nose, we aren't even aware of them. Their best work is done when, through them, we can see the [tv show we're] watching or the book we are reading. We don't see our glasses when we wear them but, when we wear them, we see!" (p.131 of *Augsberg Sermons 3*). For those of you who don't wear glasses, it is like never noticing the hair on your head until it is bothering you. For those of you without glasses or hair, well, I guess you will have to remember fondly back to when you did have hair. We become accustomed to seeing through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, working with the hands of the Holy Spirit. We can become so used to the constant presence that we no longer feel his presence. A quick clarification: because we have the presence of the Holy Spirit within us does

not mean that everything we say and do is the work of the Holy Spirit. We have free will and are not automatons taken over by the Holy Spirit. But, like the glasses or hair we do not notice, we have the peace, love, and joy of Christ's continued presence with us in the Holy Spirit. We have the comfort of oneness with our God.

There is another side to this comfort that we have been given. As Jesus is comforting his disciples in today's Gospel story, and when he actually gives them the Holy Spirit, we understand that we are given this Comforter for a reason. We are to act on this gift. We are to continue what Jesus began – loving one another according to the high bar he set for us in the example of his love, and revealing the coming perfection of God's kingdom to the world around us through the works of our love.

Jesus says that those who believe in him will “do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” This statement is puzzling for us...Jesus turned water into wine, walked on water, calmed raging storms, healed lepers, and so on. I get soakers when I misjudge the depth of a puddle and turning water into wine is a talent that would come in handy here but it is not a talent I have. How can we do greater works than Jesus? We must remember that Jesus' purpose was not to heal a leper. His purpose was not to calm a storm. Each time Jesus did these works he had one greater purpose. All his works were for the revealing of God's kingdom, to make God known to the world, and to reconcile the entire world to God through himself. *This* is our work – the ministry of reconciliation as Paul calls it. We can do greater works than Jesus by adding to the number of his followers.

The other piece of his comfort and reassurance to his disciples is, ask me for anything in my name and I'll do it. This, too, is puzzling for us because it feels that we have plenty of prayers that go unanswered. Jesus, though, immediately clarifies his “ask

me for anything” statement by pointing out that those who love him will follow his commandments. Asking Jesus for anything means asking for what aligns with his commandments. His commandments, quite simply, are to love. To love one another as he has loved us is the “new commandment” given as he washes his disciples’ feet. He repeats this again and again...love and this love will overflow into all of our works. Love and this love will reveal God’s kingdom, will make God known to the world, and will reconcile the entire world to God through Christ. In other words, our prayers are to align with God’s purpose for the world. This is reflected in our Prayers of the People each week – we ask for no more wars, no more hunger, unity for all people, and so on. We are praying for the perfection we know is coming.

There is a lot to be said about prayer but I will just quickly say that seemingly unanswered prayer does not mean that God is not listening. As much as it hurts us when we pray for a sick loved one who then dies this does not mean that we didn’t pray the right way, or that our faith wasn’t strong enough, or that God did not love this person as much as the person in the hospital bed next door who recovered. God is with each of us. God loves each of us.

To better understand the point to Jesus’ “ask me for anything” promise, we need to take it in context. Anyone who has loved someone enough to say, “I would do anything for you” knows that there are limits to that statement. Andrew H. Wakefield uses the parent/child relationship to explain. He writes, “If we extend the analogy just a little, we may be able to think of these promises as the same sort of hyperbole that parents use when they tell a child, “I would do anything for you!” The child may say, “Really? Then I want a tattoo; I want a pet elephant; I want a Ferrari!” The child has missed the point. The hyperbole shows the parent’s infinite love for the child, a love that will seek the good of the child even above the parent’s own

good....The hyperbole is a way of expressing the intimate relationship between loving parent and child—and that relationship is not simply about giving and receiving.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' promise is not a blank cheque nor is it meant to critique our prayer abilities. It is a part of his assurance that he will not leave us orphaned. We have his Spirit – our comforter and guide, our means of oneness with God, the one who helps us love as Jesus loves...allowing us to be his heart and his hands in this world. Whether we are or not is, as always, a choice we must make. Mother Teresa explains: “When you look at the inner workings of electrical things, you often see small and big wires, new and old, cheap and expensive, all lined up. Until the current passes through them there will be no light. That wire is you and me,” she says. “The current is God. We have the power to let the current pass through us, use us, produce the light of the world. Or we can refuse to be used and allow darkness to spread” (p.8 of *Mother Teresa Her Essential Wisdom*).

We are gifted with the perfect peace, love, and joy of God's presence in us...We can be perfectly one with each other; perfectly one with God. As we are drawn toward perfection, “Remember,” Mother Teresa says, “you have been created for great things” (p.12 of *Mother Teresa Her Essential Wisdom*).

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrew H. Wakefield, “What Happens When We Pray,” *Review and Expositor* 104 (2007): 806.