

Acts 2:1-21 – Pentecost Sunday Year A, 2026

In 2016, I went to Haiti as part of a medical mission trip. Now, some of you might be wondering if I have some secret background in medical work of any kind at all, and the answer is a resounding no. I went that year because my mom, a pharmacist, had been for several years, and she talked frequently about how much the work and the people of Haiti meant to her. My role during that week could affectionately be called grunt work. Any and every little thing that needed doing fell to me and the handful of other people there without a medical background. I lifted tables, sat up chairs, policed the gift shop, and pointed people to the bathrooms. On some occasions I even got the fun task of entertaining children while their parents waited to be seen by out medical staff, getting to play soccer with them or paint fingernails or take selfies. My week passed mostly in this way, doing more menial tasks to free up people with more pertinent and important skills. And, honestly, I had a blast. I loved every second of it.

On the last day, though, several of our team members from Haiti, doctors and nurses and translators who had been with us throughout the week, couldn't be there. And I found myself in a new role as a scribe for one of the doctors on staff. Basically, I took notes while the doctor worked with the patient. At the end of the long, hot day, hand cramping, eyes glazing over from hours of note taking, we finally arrived at one of our last patients. She was a small, elderly woman, exact age hard to pinpoint, but it was certain that she had seen and lived through lots of things in her life. Unlike the other patients we had seen who spoke a little English, but mostly Haitian Creole, this woman spoke Spanish almost exclusively. Unfortunately, we had no Spanish interpreters. This was terrible enough, but soon it became clear, after asking around to the remaining patients and the other medical staff members, that, horribly, *I* was the person at the

clinic who knew the most Spanish. To be clear, my Spanish consisted of three classes in high school and two in college, virtually none of which included medical Spanish. But I was the best we had, so in I went. As the patient and I chatted haltingly in Spanish, we gradually built a rapport, swapping short easy compliments and stories and doing our best to help each other understand what we were trying to say. We did this for about thirty minutes, slowly speaking and carefully listening. We made lots of progress until, finally, thankfully, someone managed to find a family member to come to the clinic who could translate from English to Spanish with much more depth and accuracy to continue her appointment and come up with a good treatment plan. And I was all too happy to return to my quiet, happy job of notetaking for the doctor.

After her appointment ended, as we were beginning to pack up for the night, she came by to see me right before she left. She told me, speaking slowly and patiently because of my limited Spanish gifts, that she was grateful for the work of the people at the clinic. She also said that her husband had died just recently, and that it was good for her to be reminded that there was goodness in the world, that people did care, and that she would remember my stilted, pitiful attempt at Spanish as a moment of joy in a season of sadness.

I couldn't help remembering that moment in Haiti as I prepped for this sermon, on a Sunday that highlights the importance of language and hearing people communicate good news to use in words we can each understand. I couldn't have known, as I sat in those classrooms through several semesters of Spanish in high school and undergraduate, how it would be useful in the future. I couldn't have known that those hours spent studying, the flashcards and the tests, would help me meaningfully relate and communicate with another person a world away from

me, going through a difficult season in her own life, in a country that seems to be perpetually hurting. But there we were, in an unexpected moment of grace and connection.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the gift that is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' incarnational time on earth has concluded, but, as Jesus himself tells the disciples, the work remains. There are still people who need healing, help, and wholeness, people in need of love, welcome, and joy, people who need to hear the Good News of a God who loves them so very much. As John's Gospel states it, God has sent Jesus, and now Jesus sends us, to pick up that thread, to keep the moving, to get to work in the world.

Thankfully, God does not expect us to do the work of ministry on our own. God, who puts that work before us, very much wants for us to succeed in it. And because of this, we, the Church, are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to encourage us as we take up Christ's ministry, to equip us for the task of being the hands and feet of Christ in the world today. Two weeks ago, we read from an earlier chapter in John's Gospel, chapter 14, which details Jesus' final address to the disciples before his arrest and death. On that night, after lovingly washing his disciples' feet, Jesus promises he will send them another gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Greek, the word Jesus chooses to describe the Holy Spirit in that passage is an interesting one: *paraclete*. It doesn't translate cleanly into English. It has a lot of facets that English has a hard time capturing in a single word. Our translation that day chose the word "Advocate," a good one, even if incomplete. In that word, we learn of the Holy Spirit as one who intercedes for us, who looks after us and our well-being. Paul will hint at this role for the Spirit in his letter to the Romans, in one of my favorite passages of scripture, when he says the Spirit intercedes for us and prays to God on our behalf. Other translations prefer to translate that word

as comforter, highlighting the Spirit's role in nurturing us, sustaining us, and keeping us. Still other translations prefer the word counselor or helper or guide or exhorter, so many translations that reveal the Spirit as the one who will show us the way, light the path, and encourage us on, giving us both wisdom to know where to go and what to do, but also the courage to say yes to God's daring plans.

This is the gift Jesus promised his disciples on the night before his death, and this is the gift we celebrate today on this Pentecost Sunday, the Holy Spirit, God so very near to us as we continue doing the loving work of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit equips us to do the work. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become gifts ourselves, gifts to a world that needs people who are desperately serious about keeping Christ's ministry of joy, love, and reconciliation alive. If we allow it, the Spirit will take the gifts we are given, and equip us to become gifts for others, taking all of who we are, and putting it to work.

I think back on my time in Haiti, sitting with that lovely woman, in that remote village, who happened to come to our clinic that day. I would not say that I am particularly gifted at languages, but I would certainly say that, in that moment, the Holy Spirit used the things I had done, the experiences I had gone through in my life, and made them a gift for someone else.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we give thanks for that first gift to the Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, who continues to encourage us and equip us for the task of taking up Christ's ministry to the world, of being Jesus's hands and feet still at work in God's creation. And we give thanks to God that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can also be gifts to the world. Each of us have been blessed and gifted by the Holy Spirit, in big ways and small ways, in obvious ways and in ways that can only become apparent in the moments they're needed. That same Holy

Spirit will equip us for the work, for the use of the gifts that we've each uniquely been given.

When we say yes to the use of those gifts, we can be certain the Spirit will use them to keep reconciling, renewing, and redeeming God's beloved creation.