

John 14:8-17

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the end of the Great Fifty Days of Easter. This is the Sunday where we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as the beginning of the universal Church, the world-wide body of believers, past, present, and future who have sought to follow the teachings of Christ and continue building up the kingdom of God. After Jesus ascends into heaven, those first few followers were left with the difficult task of figuring out what comes next, of figuring out how to continue a movement after its founder is no longer around. So many of these people had been called out of their ordinary lives, just average people called into extraordinary things. Follow me, Jesus said to them, and that's what they did. They followed. Now, with Jesus' ascension, they have been pushed into a new role as leaders. Now the direction of this new fledgling faith has fallen to them. The choices they make, how they answer the tough questions they will inevitably face will shape the community of believers for generations to come. How would they shape the church? How would they answer the hard questions that would inevitably arise? How would they go about spreading the faith, calling new people into ministry all around the known world? And how would they help direct those people into meaningful and transformative lives of faith based around the teachings of Jesus?

All these years later, we take our place as descendants of those early followers, and the work that we are called into might not be as different as we might think. We, too, are called to tell other people just how much Jesus loves them, to transform lives and, eventually, the world. We live in a time of division, suspicion, and hate, but that's honestly nothing new. Those first few disciples found themselves facing the same thing. The job of Christians in all times and places has been to remind people that goodness and joy and love and hope are just as real and much more powerful than the things that divide or degrade the people of God. We still have work to do in building up the Church, of figuring out answers to difficult but important questions about who we are as Christians, of how we preach the Good News of Christ's love to our neighbors and families and strangers and friends in our everyday lives.

Fortunately, we are not left to this work alone. Throughout his ministry, Jesus promised to provide us with a guide, a friend, a helper, an advocate in the Holy Spirit. In our Gospel reading, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will reside within each of us, helping us figure out what's good, what is of God, and what is not. Scripture shows us just how closely those apostles relied on the work of the Holy Spirit, just how much the Spirit was needed as a guide and a mentor in those early days. And the Holy Spirit is just as active now, just as active in the Church and in our lives as we seek to be faithful to God's desires and will now. When we stop and listen, we can see and feel the ways the Spirit is active now, helping us do the work that God has set before us in the unique ministries we've been called to. The Holy Spirit guides us always, calling to us in that still, small voice that we can only hear when we tune in and listen closely, helping us discern what we should do or where we should go next. Maybe it's the unbidden and expected reminder of someone you haven't heard from or checked in with in a while, maybe that's the Spirit prompting us to work. Or maybe it's the peace we feel when we're on the right track, or the discomfort we can't seem to shake when we're not. The Spirit leads us, strengthens us, prays for us, and challenges us – daring us to become better followers of God, better agents of change in the world around us, better builders of the kingdom of God. That's the gift of the Holy Spirit we

celebrate this day, the very presence of God, so close at hand in all things and through all things, guiding, prompting, and holding us.

Pentecost also reminds us that it's not only the Holy Spirit that we rely on in building up the Kingdom of God in our own time. We are also given the gift of each other. We do this work together. God knows we're not meant to be alone in this life or in this ministry. In fact, the first thing Jesus does when he sets out on his three-year ministry is to call together the people that will minister with him. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples continue that work very much in fellowship and communion. Rarely are they shown working or traveling alone. It's in community that the disciples settle major questions. It's in community that they minister and preach to the people they meet. It's in community that they share the gospel. And it's into community that they call new believers, connecting them into the network of new worshipping communities in which they can continue to hear and share Jesus' message of love together.

As we take up this ministry now, as we figure out how to share the love of God with the people around us, we are reminded on this Pentecost Sunday that we, too, are meant to be in community with each other, to support, encourage, and inspire each other, to take the unique gifts that God has given each of us, and use them to build up the kingdom, knowing that what we create together is more beautiful, more meaningful, and more effective than what we could create on our own.

Pentecost is one of the best Sundays for baptisms, and we are so fortunate to welcome Lane and Emerson into this little corner of God's kingdom. In just a few moments, we will promise to do all we can to support them in their life of faith, to invite them, as they grow, to use their unique gifts and perspectives to help us see God more fully and minister to others more effectively.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we thank God for both the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of each other, both of which make it possible for us to do the ministry God calls us into. While the world so often tells us to rely solely on ourselves, God reminds us that we were never meant to, that we were made to be in community and to continue building up that community for others to step into.