

Sermon Pentecost Year A 2026 (All Saints); John 20:19-23

“In the name of God the Creator, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen”

To Experience the Holy Spirit

Good morning and welcome to our celebration of Pentecost, the last Sunday of Easter, the 50th and last day of Eastertide. Tomorrow we enter the long Season after Pentecost, also called Ordinary time, which lasts until Advent in late November. Pentecost is one of the four major feasts in the catholic tradition—Christmas, Easter, All Saints, and Pentecost. Another name for today is Whitsunday. Why Whitsunday? Some say because it used to be the last day for the color white before Ordinary Time. My favorite explanation for the name is that the Holy Spirit “scared the wits” out of those in the Upper Room that day! Today we celebrate the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. You will notice that the hangings and vestments are red. I will never forget the first time I wore this red chasuble. It was here during my ordination as priest just over five years ago. My then eight year old granddaughter Brooks said, “Boba, you look like a big tomato!” Why red for Pentecost? Red is a symbol of fire, as Luke puts it in describing the powerful entrance of the Holy Spirit in the reading from Acts today, “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...”

Before going further today I want to give you a little inside scoop about what we learn in seminary about homiletics, that’s how to preach. There are several methods or approaches, what we call “forms,” to use in preparing a sermon. Two of the basic forms are the deductive and inductive methods. Perhaps the most foundational is the deductive approach. Basically it boils down to #1) saying in the beginning what you want to talk about—the message, the core affirmation statement; then #2) develop that message in the body of the sermon, and #3) in the end summarize what you just told them. Or, even more

simply: first tell them what you will be telling them, then tell them, and finally tell them what you just told them! Pretty simple, and that's the approach I will use today. It gives me several opportunities to talk about the Holy Spirit, which is what today is all about.

On most Sunday mornings—those when I am here at All Saints—Cynthia and I get to church around 7:15 or so, and we typically gather in Jim's office where he and Josh are already sitting. The four of us talk about all kinds of things—our families, football or basketball, who is leading the golf tournament, also pastoral things like what's going on in the congregation. This past Sunday with tongue in cheek I asked Jim what he thought I should preach about today Pentecost Sunday. He said (and I paraphrase) “I have a radical idea. How about preaching about the Holy Spirit?” We laughed. Then this past Tuesday I asked Beth Hardaway what she thought I'd be preaching about. She paused a second, and said “the Breath.” I said “yes, you are right.” That is the Breath of God, in Hebrew the “ruach,” as we read in Genesis: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” The “wind of God,” or as Eugene Peterson in his The Message Bible translation puts it “God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.” Yes, that Spirit, what we as Christians call the Holy Spirit, is our focus today. It is the very Presence of God in us and around us, wherever we look, in whatever we do. It is powerful, and yet so easy to miss! So, here is the core affirmation statement today: “We encounter the Holy Spirit in the ordinary moments of our lives.”

Cynthia and I have a prayer garden at our house in the courtyard outside our bedroom doors. It's ceiling is an arbor covered by a thick layer of jasmine the sweet scent of which for about a month every spring envelops our yard and that of our neighbors. In the garden are several items that direct our focus to God. On one wall is a plaque with the Prayer for Peace attributed to St. Francis which begins: “Lord make me an instrument of your peace: where there is

hatred, let me sow love...” We have a statue of St. Francis holding the bird that you have all seen. There is a fountain with two cherubs with water flowing from their mouths. On one wall is the tree of life the leaves and branches of which are made of metal. And on the brick wall of the house hang three crosses of different sizes that we got from Mexico decades ago. They are made of now-rusted metal inlaid with multiple colored tiles. At first I had a hard time deciding which of the three crosses represented God, which the Son, and which the Holy Spirit. Far be it from me to decide which of the three persons of the Trinity gets the biggest cross! But I have decided—at least for me—that the largest cross represents the Holy Spirit. It stands out for me. It grabs my attention. I can feel its Presence while sitting there in silence in the garden. The Spirit is powerful. It is not only that wind, the breath of God that moved over the deep in the very beginning. It is not only the Spirit that inspired the Old Testament prophets to speak the truth of God in the face of the unjust powers that lorded over the people. It is not only the sound like the rush of a violent wind that filled the house and the disciples on that first Pentecost. It is also the living Presence of God moving through ordinary human lives today.

These stories in scripture about the Holy Spirit are dramatic, unforgettable events. Yet, I would venture to say that we rarely experience the Spirit that way. We don't wake up to rushing winds. We don't see flames dancing. We don't suddenly begin to speak with our own language in ways that others can hear in theirs. Instead, we live ordinary lives. We try to raise our children. We care for aging parents. We worry about the health and safety of ourselves and our loved ones. We struggle with uncertainty, and with loneliness, and with loss. We sometimes wonder if God is near at all. And so Pentecost, the day the church begins so dramatically with the movement of the Spirit into the disciples, can feel unreal and distant from our actual lives. But the truth of Pentecost is not that the Holy Spirit only appears in spectacular moments. The truth is that the Spirit is constantly present, constantly moving, constantly breathing through the

ordinary moments of daily life. Pentecost is not merely the story of what happened then. It is the story of what God is doing now. And the Spirit is not restricted to those we think of as being spiritually elite—to saints, monks, mystics, or people of unshakable faith. It comes to ordinary people, people both joyful and sad, to anxious people, to grieving people, to tired people, to people like us facing all the ups and downs of ordinary life.

Think about the ways the Spirit moves through daily life. We see it in the compassion of friends as they step up to be with and take care of one who is grieving the loss of a loved one. We see it when the teacher encourages a tearful struggling child who has begun to believe they are worthless. We see it as church members collect food and clothing to feed the hungry and to clothe those living on the street. Perhaps our faith has grown weak, and a friend offers us hope. Someone reminds us that we are loved. Someone shows us light when all we see is darkness. It is easy to miss her, to not notice her presence, but the Spirit is always there. These are not dramatic moments, but they are holy moments, holy because they reflect the continuing presence of Christ alive in the world.

One thing that Pentecost and the movement of the Holy Spirit teaches us is that she moves across all divisions, all races, all the different kinds of people. People from every nation—[and let me take a moment to complement Gabe/ Gabby on his/her pronunciation of all those difficult names in the Acts reading]—people from all those nations in the story we read today heard the gospel in their own language. The Spirit did not erase human differences—did not cancel them out—but rather crossed them. And perhaps this is the most urgent Pentecost message for our world today. We live in a culture of division, anger, hatred, of violence. People speak over and past one another—few take the time to listen. We see growing divisions within communities and between nations and within economies. Growing intolerance of any opinion other than our own. Politics has hardened our hearts. Yet the Spirit is still there, still alive wherever people truly

listen with respect. Where dignity is restored. Where enemies become neighbors. Where reconciliation begins. Where truth—the truth of the Gospel—reigns. We see the Spirit moving in every act of compassion, of understanding, of love. It is the Spirit who now sends us out into the world to help build this Kingdom Jesus describes in the gospels, the kingdom of courage, mercy, justice, forgiveness, generosity, of hope, of truth. The same Spirit that moved over creation...the same Spirit that spoke through the prophets...the same Spirit that sprung forth as a swirling wind in the Upper Room at Pentecost...that same Spirit lives within creation, including all of us. Let us look for her. And ask her where she wants us to go.

I will turn once again to one of my favorite theologians and author Frederick Buechner, now deceased, who said about this spirit, this power within the very heart of creation, “from deep within whatever the hidden spring is that life wells up from, there wells up into our lives, even at their darkest and maybe especially then, a power to heal, to breath new life into us...I do not believe that it matters greatly what name you call this power—the Spirit of God is only one of its names—but what I think does matter, vastly, is that we open ourselves to receive it...that we move in the direction that it seeks to move us, the direction of fuller communion with itself and with one another...”

So listen for the Spirit. Look for her and you will find her: in every prayer for help, every act of mercy, every courageous truth, every call for justice, every movement toward love. These are the signs that she is still breathing throughout the world. The “ruach” here since the beginning. And perhaps that is how most of us will encounter her: not in fire, or in the wind, but in the quiet ordinariness of our daily lives transformed by God’s presence therein. Or, perhaps, you will find her in the quietness of a silent prayer.

So, I have reached part three of my deductive sermon form. First I told you what I was going to tell you. Then I told you. Now I get to tell you what I just told you. I will let you in your own words finish that third part.

Rev. Bob Donnell