

Sermon Sunday May 19 2024 Pentecost

A blessed Pentecost to you all! I love seeing the red here in the church – you all got the memo and dressed accordingly. For those not wearing visible red, no worries – you’ve got good red energy going in your hearts. So let’s talk about Pentecost.

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the church, when the Holy Spirit descended to guide the disciples in the work that Jesus asked them to do, and we hear that in a very colorful way in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which showed how people who spoke many different languages were able to communicate with each other and understand each other across their differences so that they could work together as Christ asked them to do.

That story of the descent of the Holy Spirit was actually foretold by Jesus in our Gospel today. He was teaching the disciples about what was to come, and he knew one thing: they were afraid of what would happen after he was gone.

In short, they were feeling fear of abandonment.

One of our greatest fears, one I’ve heard from so many folks, is that fear of abandonment. Of being left behind. Of being alone when one who we had relied upon is gone.

Whether that fear gripped us as children when our mothers left to go to the store, or as adults when our partners departed through death or divorce, it is a powerful feeling.

Certainly we hear this in the Gospel of John, when we hear Jesus teaching the disciples that he is going away, but they should not worry. He is giving them

someone to continue in what is to follow his departure. They will continue being Jesus' followers. He is sending them someone who is the Paraclete, or the Advocate, who will walk alongside them – the literal translation of the Greek Parakletos – and serve in many different ways, depending on their needs.

This passage is part of a much longer farewell discourse from Jesus, and the Advocate is there through it all, and this gives us clues to what the Advocate promises to do.

In essence, the Advocate is a first-responder. Comforter, aide, intercessor, companion, witness, guide...throughout this discourse we hear the many ways the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will accompany the disciples as they sort out what their next steps are. So, too, this Holy Spirit, this Advocate, accompanies us and is a first-responder of a sort to us.

Jesus knows his disciples well. He knows that they might fall away from what he taught – they are human beings, after all. He knows the pressures of the outside world may oppress them. The temple may no longer accept them as good Jews, and there is the likelihood that some will deride them or try to hurt them.

Jesus tells the disciples about this Advocate so they do not feel abandoned, but his words are equally potent for us, as we prepare for another transition – my departure and the eventual arrival of a new permanent rector for this parish.

I know that this is a time of many feelings. It is for me as well. But I do know this: the Advocate will walk alongside you and me as Jesus promised, so

that our feelings and our fears will not overwhelm us. We will “feel all the feels,” as younger people sometimes say, but they will not stop us in our tracks.

Feeling anxious? The Advocate helps you calm down and know that in time all will be completed. Feeling like you’re in unfamiliar territory? The Advocate serves as your gentle guide to what comes next and offers hope. Feeling exhausted? The Advocate says, “stop and take a breath and gather your strength. I’ll hold you in my arms until you’re ready to go again.” Feeling angry? The Advocate takes the poison of your anger and reframes it in a way that lets you ease through it to the other side.

This time of change is something that has happened to each of us a thousand times before. Remember when you needed reading glasses for the first time? It has happened to the church a million times before. Remember when the Episcopal Church was formed after our nation claimed independence from England? Remember when the Apostle Paul got into an argument with Peter about Gentiles becoming Christ followers and they actually came to a healthy compromise? Remember when Christ Church was planted as a mission of Grace Church and eventually led to a merger that started off a little rough, but smoothed out over time?

All of these moments of change and disorientation began with fears, until the Advocate helped those going through them to catch their breath and trust in God.

We can trust in God. We’ve seen God’s power. We’ve seen miracles. We’ve seen a sea change in how we work together, and how we dream for the future. We know that we are not abandoned. We are not alone. We have

someone who walks alongside us always, our first responder, the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. We can keep on building new things and growing in new ways, because that is what is possible, with Jesus in our hearts and the Holy Spirit at our side.

And so we pray:

O Lord, you taught us your message and your love by sending to us the light of your Holy Spirit: help us trust that by the same Spirit we will make wise decisions be ever aware of your care, and to always rejoice in the holy comfort that the Spirit brings; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*