

**May 20, 2018**  
**Festival of Pentecost**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15**

The holy gospel, according to Saint John, the fifteenth chapter.  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said,] <sup>26</sup>“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

<sup>16:4b</sup>“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>12</sup>“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The gospel of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

Blessings to you, my friends, on this Festival of Pentecost.

Today is a day of fire and power and love and languages and maybe a little bit of drama and theater...Today is the day often called the birthday of the church...and today is a day when we return to our source, to the waters of Baptism...especially with Skye, Bennett, and Zane...on the day of their Confirmation.

We aren't, of course, confirming them...in the sense that we aren't sure if they exist. We know they do. And we are so glad they do. What is confirmed today is that they live their lives within the promises made at a place like this...many years ago. Even more than that,

what is confirmed today is that they live their lives within the love of God...and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit...

When we emerge from the waters of our baptism...we are, as Paul says, new creations. We are not the same on the other side of those waters. We are in fact not alive in the same way. In that little pool of water, we are joined with our ancestors, with the people of God, from the beginning of time...

Small as it may seem...when we journey through the waters of baptism and emerge on the other side...

We emerge from the Red Sea, from between the walls of water and into a new land...

We emerge, blinking in the sun, from the ark and into a new earth...

We emerge, from the Jordan River, like Naaman...who was healed in spite of his himself...and we are new people

We cross the parting water of the Jordan, like Elisha testing the new power God has given him...and we have a new calling.

We walk out onto the streets of a new holy city...where a river and tree of life stand in the middle of God's people...and we discover a new heaven has come to earth.

And what is life on the other side of the water like?

In this new life, we will be gifted and burdened with new ways of seeing the world... with ways of hearing our fellow children of God...

We will begin to see what is possible beyond what we live now...

We will begin to hear what God's whispers to the wind...

We will begin to hope and dream with the Spirit of truth...

It's kind of like when you buy a new car and all of a sudden you see it everywhere...or when you learn a new word and start to hear it all the time...It is like when you learn a new idea in school or at work, and all of a sudden the world is shaped a new way...For me...once I began to learn about whiteness and race...all of a sudden it was everywhere...Once we are given the ability, we can see the shape of our world more clearly. The Spirit does that, too.

And it is amazing. But, to our confirmands...and anyone else entering a new chapter of this journey...I have to warn you...once you are given these ways of seeing the world. Once the Spirit lights a fire in your heart...you will not be able to turn it off...

You will be living with your calling placed before you every moment of every day...and it will hurt when you feel yourself turning your back because it is too hard...because you will feel how your failures break God's heart...

You will feel the pain of sisters, brothers, siblings who are erased, forgotten, and betrayed in this world.

You might wish you could return to not knowing, not seeing, not feeling...but you can't...

In Baptism...you are given God's **eyes, ears and heart**...We are born into new life in baptism...and we grow in the gifts we receive at the water.

The power of Pentecost is being given the power to **speak and act**...The Holy Spirit arrives to empower us to live as who we really are when we emerge from baptism's waters.

So, I want to tell you a few things...especially on this Confirmation Sunday...about what the power of the Spirit looks like. Because it's overwhelming, but it's also awesome.

See, the power of the Spirit is unruly and raucous and doesn't care about being respectable. The Spirit laughs loud in public and tells the truth even if it's going to cause a scene. The Spirit has a wicked sense of humor. Life in the Spirit is hard...but it's as much fun as you'll ever find anywhere.

We can find it in the second chapter of Acts...when the wind rushes in...all fire and mayhem...and the people who see the Spirit's power at work think the people under its influence are drunk.

We can find it all over the Bible, too, like when a rich landowner spots his long-gone, ungrateful son and throws his robe up over his arm and runs down the road like a three year old who has just seen their parent and can't stand to wait to hug them for a moment longer than they have to, even though everyone is staring. (That's the parable of the prodigal son in Luke.)

We see it when Jesus strikes up a socially inappropriate conversation with a foreign woman by a well, and promises her access to the water of life, even though she was an

outcast...and she runs into town to tell everyone, even the people who scorned her, and even though it means acknowledging her life's dirty laundry in public. (That the Samaritan woman at the well in John.)

We see it when God decides to come live with us, and is born of a human woman...a helpless baby...who soiled diapers and had to learn how to speak...and who was a little more sassy than necessary when his parents lost track of him when he was twelve...and who eventually lived a life of powerful love that scared people so much they killed him in the most humiliating way they knew how.

I actually think the verses our confirmands have selected to be read in worship today offer us a truly excellent sampling of what the Spirit is up to in the world...

In Matthew, Zane has chosen to claim that Jesus says everything in the world...every law from God is grounded in love. Love of God...love of each other...and love of ourselves. And without all three, the law would fall apart.

Skye has chosen the angel's visit to Mary...a young, poor, unmarried girl...who has just been told she will be the mother of God. And when she asks how, the angel tells her that everything is possible for God...and she manages to respond in a way more faithful way than I can imagine, and say, "Here I am...let it be as you have said."

Now Bennett has chosen a passage I wonder if you all knew about...from Second Kings, when the prophet Elisha, who has only recently inherited the power of his predecessor, Elijah...is going throughout the countryside acting in that power given to him by God. He made the water in the city of Jericho clean...and then he came to Bethel where he was mocked by what must have been quite a hoard of young boys. But God showed them about respecting God's prophet and their elders by sending 2 bears who killed 42 of them. Now the text makes it sound like there were some who survived, as well, so I suppose we can all hope that if any bears ever show up to maul the disrespectful, we might be some of the one who escape. And honestly...more than 40 kids ganging up on an old guy who is just visiting their town?

I'm not saying they deserved to be mauled to death or anything...but honestly...

And this is the thing...I think the Spirit gives us the power and permission to bring humor and hyperbole to our holy texts. And I hope all of us can engage with Scripture and our own lives with a sense of humor and curiosity, like Bennett does.

It really is so important that the Spirit is as unruly, unbound by convention, and ready to love and laugh as she is...as these verses all show us...because the Spirit has come to help

us live into those promises we are about to hear repeated today, which are made as we come through baptism's water:

to live among God's faithful people,  
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,  
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,  
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,  
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Those are promises too big to bound by convention, propriety, humorlessness, or cynicism. Without huge, wild, unrespectable love and absurd hope against all hope...these promises are nothing short of ridiculous...so we have the Spirit to propel us into the vastness of these promises...and maybe to everyone else, we have to seem day-drunk to say we think we can keep them...

It is ridiculous that we should make promises like this as if we can keep them. As much as we dress it up like a graduation ceremony, or put it in new shoes that pinch our feet...and take photos to hang on the wall or post on facebook...It's actually scandalous, what our confirmands are about to do.

The Spirit at work is a scandalous thing.

Now we are easily scandalized...it's true...too easily maybe...

Maybe we get too upset when people don't wear the "right" clothes, or speak "properly," or chew with their mouths closed, or share the uncomfortable silence about truths people would rather ignore.

But it is also true that God is truly scandalous...because the Lord of the universe dresses like a servant and washes feet...and is viciously put to death on the empire's instrument of torture.

We are easily scandalized...but God is also truly scandalous.

So, when you hear a rustle of wind...when you wonder what is in store for you...remember what our God does. Remember that our God brings dry bones back to life. Remember that our God sends the Spirit into the world and shatters respectability. Remember that love and truth are above all things and that the Spirit will take you to places where love and truth come into conflict with other things that you have been taught to hold in high regard.

Remember that love and truth win.

Remember that love and truth have claimed you.

The Spirit is here, and what comes after this is going to be holy and unruly, and scandalous and good.

May it be as God has said.

Amen.