

**We Are Not Alone**  
**May 23, 2021, Pentecost Sunday**

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator and Sustainer, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that abides in each of us.

Fifty days ago today, we celebrated Easter Sunday, which means that today is Pentecost Sunday. This is the day we celebrate the birth of the church, or we can also think of it as the day the church was first baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now, we know this day as a Christian celebration, but actually Pentecost was and is first a Jewish festival day. No, the Jews did not celebrate the birth of the church, but for them Pentecost was and is a festival that occurs 50 days after the Passover, and it was known as Pentecost, or even more commonly known as the Festival of Weeks or Shavout. We read in the Books of Exodus (23:14-16) and Leviticus (23:15-17) where God had commanded the Israelites to celebrate this festival day. It was intended to be a time of celebration that reminded the people of two things. First, it was to remind them that God gave them the harvest that would now sustain them, and secondly, it was a celebration in remembrance of God giving them the Torah, the Law, that would also sustain them. It was an important festival day for the Jews, and one that many Jews would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate. In fact, Shavout was just celebrated last week.

Now, according to the Book of Acts, on the day of Pentecost Jews from all over the world, including the disciples, were all together when “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 and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:2-4).

Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, Jesus fulfilled a promise he made to his disciples, "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" (John 16:7), or as he promised the disciples in the Gospel of Luke, "You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49).

Now, I know for most of us, Christmas and Easter are important holidays, and I get why, but Pentecost Sunday is a big deal and one that all too often we fail to recognize its importance and what it means for us today. As we read the Pentecost story from Acts this morning, you probably had to agree that the writer of this story made it sound dramatic and powerful. I mean, wind and tongues of fire; that sounds impressive, doesn't it? And then I read the story of John, and that was so much less dramatic and powerful. In fact, it was downright dull, wasn't it? I mean, I just said Pentecost is a big deal and it is critical for us today, so why read such a dull story? Why not stick with the winds and fire stuff? Well, let's take a closer look at that first Pentecost Sunday of the church.

First of all, I know I am going to burst some bubble here, but the story doesn't say there was wind that day. It says, "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind..." (Acts 1:2). There was a sound, but there was no wind. Secondly, there was no fire. It literally says, "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them..." (2:3). Yes, there was a loud sound and, yes, there were things that looked like tongues of fire, but there was no fire and no wind. The event was important, and it still has incredible importance for us today, but it wasn't as dramatic as we make it out to be. In fact, I believe when we focus too much on the theatrical side of this day, wind and fire,

we miss the importance of today. And what is so important about today? Well, as I have already said, today is the day we celebrate the fulfillment of the promise that God's church and God's people would receive God's Holy Spirit, and in the conversation we read from our gospel story between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus explains to us the critical role that the Spirit plays both in the Christian community and in the world. Just as God gave the harvest and the Torah to the people to sustain them, God gave the church the Holy Spirit to sustain us. In other words, we are not alone.

The Holy Spirit will walk with us, the Holy Spirit will testify the truth to the world that Jesus is our Lord, the Holy Spirit will open the world's eyes to the reality of sin and the reality of God's righteousness, and the Holy Spirit will continue to open our hearts and our minds to new things and new teachings. But, how will the Holy Spirit do these things? Well, the Holy Spirit will do them through you and me, and we know this because Jesus says so.

In our story today, Jesus begins by saying, "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, will testify on my behalf" (15:26). The word we translate as "Advocate" is "paraklete." Literally this word means "one who walks alongside," "one who walks with..." The Holy Spirit, the Advocate, is God's presence in our lives that walks with us in our lives. The Advocate is with us in times of joy, in times of sorrow, in times of fear, in times of uncertainty, and the Advocate is the one that will reveal the truth to us and strengthen us to reveal this same truth to the world, even when it means we will be condemned by the world. Jesus sends this Advocate, or as he also calls it, the Spirit of truth, to help his followers, that's you and me, to live in the Way of Jesus.

My friends, we live in a world that is broken and is desperate for kindness and healing. We live in a world filled with racism, bigotry, and hatred. This past year has shown how much we need each other. We are part of a church that struggles to tell a story of this God that loves her creation so much that she died for us. We are part of a church that the world continues to reject and turn away from. We are part of a faith community that is struggling itself and questions now, more than ever, to know how we will go into the future sharing God's story so that others might know the joy of Christ.

Because of Pentecost, though, we need not fear; we need not wonder if we have the strength, the courage, or the wisdom to make tough decisions. No, we need not worry about these things because we have been gifted with an Advocate, God's Holy Spirit, that will walk with us, that will guide us and will strengthen us so that God's will, will be done in and through this church. Our future is strong, our future is bright, and our future is in God's hands, not ours. Our challenge today, on this Pentecost Sunday, is to remember that, in the waters of our baptisms, we were gifted with the Holy Spirit. That Advocate is with us today and will be with us always, and with this Advocate we can and will be witnesses to these things. May we never forget to believe and to trust that God's Advocate is with us now and forever, and we know this because Jesus promised it and it has been fulfilled today. Praise be to God. Amen.