

Scripture: John 15:26 – 27; 16:4b – 15

In the Christian calendar, today is Pentecost. Traditionally, it's all about the Spirit. It marks the transition from the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, to the birth and early history of the Church – which is Jesus' body – Jesus' on-going presence in the world.

Often, on Pentecost Sunday, we read the story from Acts 2 in which we hear tell of a sound like a great, rushing wind followed by what looked like tongues of fire that rested on the disciples. It's a story full of drama and excitement. It grabs the imagination – we can picture ourselves there. Maybe in the room with the wind and fire. Maybe in the street outside, curious about the sounds coming from within. Maybe in the crowd after the disciples left that room and miraculously spoke in all the different languages of Jerusalem during a high holiday.

It's great story-telling of a great event. No wonder it's the story we tell year after year on Pentecost Sunday. No wonder it's the event we turn to when we're trying to understand how the Spirit might show up in our lives, in our time, in our city. No wonder we're disappointed if the Spirit's entrance into our lives is quieter, more subdued, less public...

This Acts 2 story isn't the *only place* the Spirit shows up in the Bible. And it's not the *only way* the Spirit shows up. In fact, this is the only time in the entire Bible, that the Spirit shows up like this. Consider how the great prophet Elijah encountered the Spirit: In 1 Kings 19, we're told that at one of Elijah's lowest moments – he felt alone, abandoned, isolated, hopeless, afraid – at this desperate moment, God invited Elijah to meet Him face-to-face (not really, face-to-face as that's not possible because of God's hugeness, but face-to-face is the best way I can think to explain the tangibility of God's presence God was inviting Elijah into). God told Elijah to go stand on a mountain to see the Lord pass by, which Elijah did, and this is what he experienced:

“There was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard *it*, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

God was not in the wind or the fire (like He was in the Acts 2 event). For Elijah, God was in the silence. The Spirit – who is God – was not rushing wind or tongues of fire, but silence.

The descriptors and names used of the Holy Spirit are wildly diverse. I'm going to list a few, but feel free to use the chat to share the ones you can think of.

Job 33: the breath of the Almighty

Isaiah 11: ...the spirit of wisdom and understanding  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord...

Hebrews 9: the eternal Spirit

Proverbs 1: it's often understood that the references to wisdom are to the Holy Spirit

In John's gospel, when Jesus is talking to His disciples about the fact that He's going to be leaving them before too long, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. He describes the Holy Spirit and helps them understand the Spirit's role in things. He uses two different names for the Spirit.

Andrea is going to read the passage for us. If you want to follow along, you'll find it beginning at John 15:26.

<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.

“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.

Did you catch the names for the Holy Spirit?

Right off the top, in John 15:26, Jesus refers to the Spirit as the Advocate. Sometimes translators choose *Helper* or *Comforter*, but neither of those words are quite big enough. The word in Greek is *paraclete*. It's a word that was used at the time for a person who appears on behalf of another person, like a mediator or intercessor. It carries a sense of one who is *alongside*. The word Advocate, that you'll find in many translations, is probably the best choice in that it captures a bunch of these ideas all at once. An advocate is someone who speaks for you when you can't speak for yourself or when your voice is not being heard or taken seriously. An advocate ensures you have the tools you need and provides the support you need to make good decisions – like after getting a hard medical diagnosis or when going to court. An advocate champions your cause alongside you. They don't do it for you. But they're in it with you, empowering you, equipping you, getting you to where you need to be. THIS is who Jesus promises. THIS is who comes to carry on Jesus' work with His disciples. – with us!

There's another name for the Spirit that Jesus uses in this short passage. Right off the top, in verse 26 of chapter 15, almost immediately after referring to the Spirit as *the Advocate*, Jesus speaks of *the Spirit of Truth*.

*Everything* the Spirit says and does is true. There's no fake news or alternative facts in the Spirit. There are no lies or misrepresentations or false assumptions. There are no inaccuracies or delusions or fantasies. There is only truth. In our world of conspiracy theories, political posturing and plotting, don't we long for truth? Don't we long for the assurance that comes with knowing we can trust what's being said without having to fact check everything? That's the Spirit that Jesus promised to send. That's the Trinity who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is not just defined *by* truth; God *is* truth. Jesus said it in John 14: I am the way, the truth, and the life. Now He says it of the Spirit when He names Him the Spirit of Truth.

Because He is the Spirit of Truth, we know we can trust everything He says. That is so important for the disciples – for us – to understand. It's not an accident that of all the names and descriptors used of the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture, Jesus chooses *Spirit of Truth* and *Advocate* here.

Here's what's going on: Jesus will soon be gone. It's something He knows, but that His disciples don't yet totally understand. As with anyone facing their own death, there are some things Jesus needs to say. There are some things His people – His friends – His disciples – need to hear. Jesus knows that even being with these men and women almost 24-7 for the last three years isn't enough. There's more to say. There's more to teach. But He's not going to be around to say it or teach it. At least, not like he's been these last years.

What if they forget the things He taught? What if they forget the things He did? Our memories are fallible, after all.

But that is not going to be a problem. Because Jesus is not going to leave them alone. He's not going to leave them to their own fallible memories and recollections. He's not going to leave them to question the things they think He taught, but that all the other religious types disagree with. In the beginning of John 16, in the verses we didn't read, Jesus warns the disciples that the religious leaders – the ones who will say Jesus was a heretic, a liar, a blasphemer, an agent of the devil even – they'll throw them out of the synagogues. And in doing so, they'll think they're honouring God. Jesus says to His disciples (including us), “and you may start to believe them, you may start to question the things I taught. You may start to question me – to question what is true. And I won't be there, with you, to protect you, to remind you, to teach you. But that is actually a good thing. I know it doesn't seem like it right now. But trust me. It's a good thing. Because when I go, I'm going to send the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit to you. And He'll take care of everything.

“All the things they think they know – those religious types who will toss you out, shun you, seek to destroy you – all the things they think they know about sin, about righteousness, about judgment... the Advocate – the Spirit of Truth – will prove wrong. He who is Truth will guide you into all truth. Just like I've done, He'll speak God's words. When they tell you sin is solved by trying really hard, by following the Law perfectly, or when they tell you sin isn't real, the Spirit of Truth will remind you of me; the Spirit of Truth will remind you that I am the answer to sin. The Spirit of Truth will teach you the deep mysteries of my death and resurrection – of the ancient breaking of creation that my death and resurrection will heal.

“When they tell you that they are righteous, that they are holy, that all their rituals and traditions make them exactly what God wants... When they tell you that I am cursed by God, that I am the exemplar of all that is unrighteous, unholy, unacceptable, the Spirit of Truth will testify to my place at the right hand of the Father, glorified as He is glorified.

“When they tell you that they have the right, assigned by God, to judge you; when they tell you that you have been judged by God and found wanting, the Spirit of Truth will tell you the real truth: God alone is Judge. And God has already pronounced judgment on the guilty party. The ruler of this world – the Satan, the devil, the Tempter – has been judged and condemned. Sin and death have been defeated. That is the truth.

“The Spirit of Truth will guide you into all truth. The Advocate will testify on my behalf. All the things I haven't been able to teach you yet... the Spirit will teach you.”

Can you imagine what it was like to be in that room that day? Can you imagine what it was like to hear Jesus say these things? I wonder if any of it registered in the moment, or if they were too distraught by His talk of leaving them, to really be able to hear Him.

But that's the amazing thing about the Spirit: they didn't have to trust their own memories or their own understanding. That's the point. The spirit reminds, teaches, and explains. The Spirit takes responsibility for carrying on Jesus' mission and ministry. And not just for those first disciples – for us as well.

The Advocate Jesus promised is our Advocate. The Spirit is our champion, who comes alongside us, who empowers us, equips us, and gets us where we need to be. The Spirit of Truth Jesus promised those earliest disciples is the same Spirit we are invited to embrace. And so I ask you: Will you embrace the Spirit? Will you allow the Advocate to come alongside you as you live your life? Will you allow the Spirit of Truth to teach you? What do you need to do to make room for the Spirit? What do you need to let go of? to confess? to confront?

The Spirit is ready and waiting. All that remains is our response.