

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

Pentecost (B)

May 20, 2018

DRAFT

“Love can overcome all”

8 AM and 10 AM homilies

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Jesus said to his disciples, “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. 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. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Help us, Lord Christ, to experience your holy refining fire that melts and purifies our cold unbelieving and unloving hearts.

Amen.

A woman stood up in a mainline church service and exclaimed, “Alleluia, praise the Lord!” An usher quietly approached her and whispered, “Madam, we don’t do that here.” To which she replied, “But I’ve got the Spirit!” And the usher answered, “Well, you certainly didn’t get it here!” (Maybe it was an Episcopal church, I don’t know for sure...)

No “mainline” congregation gets “caught up in the Spirit” generally. However, as a child, growing up in a large Southern Baptist Church, very occasionally one of the few farmers in the congregation would ‘go

on a tear' as some would call it, and start ranting and raving; and I can remember the great unease of my father whenever that happened. My dad was none too pleased that the pastor 'allowed' such things to happen. Maybe that's why I became an Episcopalian...

One of the aspects of the Holy Spirit which is not so often noted is as God's refining fire. How many of us realize that much of what we do has more than one motivation? If what we do does not 'promote' us or 'promote' a cause we espouse, justly or unjustly, we generally shy

away from doing such a thing. However, we could be ‘called out’ by God for doing something for self rather than doing a selfless action that benefits others. Probably no action on our part will ever be completely ‘pure’, yet God wants us to find love in our hearts for others, so God through God’s Holy Spirit may come into our lives at ‘inconvenient’ times to challenge us to rethink our motivation as well as our action. This is a common failure of modern society, I believe. We try to shroud our personal interest in the cloak that we are really advocating for the ‘common good’, when in

fact we are promoting our popularity or prestige in some larger group whose respect we seek. However, when our actions are superficial, the Holy Spirit will ‘see through’ what we are doing and will often offer us a correcting suggestion, or occasionally God will place a constant barrier against us that will finally make us reevaluate and refine our motivation and action. God through the Holy Spirit at those times would be considered God’s Refining Fire. When we do something that is unholy or degrading or unloving to someone else, then our egos may have gotten a bit or a lot

out of control. Fortunately, God will not allow us to wallow in sin for long unless we are so stubborn that God lets us eventually experience the downside of our less than holy actions. God cannot be fooled no matter how much we try to fool God.

Pentecost, the feast we celebrate today, is perhaps the oldest Christian festival. It appears to have been observed from the first year after the Ascension of the Lord and every year after, even before Easter or Christmas was observed (Roger L. Ray, in “SermonMall” for Pentecost). Originally the Jews observed Pentecost as the fiftieth

day after the Passover. It was called the Feast of Weeks and seems to have been a spring harvest festival and also a celebration of the liberation from oppression through the escape from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Constance M. Burgh in "SermonMall" for Pentecost). Pentecost has been called the 'birthday of the Church.' And, indeed, the disciples who were once hiding behind locked doors become new people once they have received the coming of the Holy Spirit. Their fear was transformed into joy and power. Their timidness and backwardness fell away, and they boldly proclaimed the

good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God. At Pentecost something dramatic happened.

Since Easter began to be observed, Pentecost has been linked as being the last day of the Easter season. The Greek word, pentecostes, means ‘fifty’; thus, the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost.

‘In early Judaism the Festival of Weeks (Hebrew: שבועות Shavuot) was a harvest festival that was celebrated seven weeks and one day after the first Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Deuteronomy 16:9 or seven weeks and one day after the Sabbath in Leviticus 23:16. The Festival of

Weeks was also called the feast of Harvest in Exodus 23:16 and the day of first fruits in Numbers 28:26. In Exodus 34:22 it is called the “firstfruits of the wheat harvest.” (We are to give of the firstfruits of our efforts as an offering to God.) The date for the “Feast of Weeks” originally came the day after seven full weeks following the first harvest of grain. In Jewish tradition the fiftieth day was known as the Festival of Weeks. (In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Easter.)

‘After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD, offerings could no longer

be brought to the temple and the festival (of weeks) started to have a different focus: the giving of the law on Sinai. This feast eventually received the name Pentecost from the Koine Greek word “pentekoste” meaning “fiftieth” day. The (first Old Testament) actual mention of fifty days comes from Leviticus 23:16, (when the Israelites were to bring an offering of their first harvests to God, fifty days after the seeds had been sown and had produced their first crop).

In the New Testament, ‘in Christian tradition, Pentecost is of course an important

event that marks the shifting of God's redemptive purpose from the “descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” to all peoples. Scholars believe that even if the Pentecost narrative is not literally true, it does signify an important event in the history of the early Church that enabled the rapid spread of Christianity. Within a few decades important congregations had been established in all major cities of the Roman Empire.

‘The biblical narrative of Pentecost is given in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 stresses

the resurrection and exaltation. In his sermon Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 and Psalm 16 to indicate that first Pentecost marks the start of the Messianic Age (when we were delivered from the prison of the religious laws of Israel and are now saved by our faith in God's only Son, Jesus Christ). About one hundred and twenty followers of Christ (Acts 1:15) were present.'

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pentecost>

'Some people have the illusion that God, the Spirit, the Counselor, will solve all our problems. That is not true. Like any good counselor, the Spirit enables us to

become stronger but does not control us. Nor does the Spirit/Counselor make decisions for us. Sometimes, that is just what we want; we want God miraculously to make decisions for us, especially difficult decisions. But rather, God is the “paraclete,” who comes to our side and gives us the strength and new resources and new insights, so we ourselves with God’s help can make difficult and painful decisions. But the Spirit, the Holy Counselor, does not solve our problems or make decisions for us--nor does any good counselor. There is that passage from

Philippians where God says that the love in us is to grow and grow and grow so that we will make the best choices (Philippians 1:8-9). God's focus is on love growing inside, whereby we (ourselves) can make the best choices.'

-Lutheran Pastor Edward Markquart

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/pentecost_counselor.htm

The Holy Spirit fills in the ragged areas of being a human being. We are tossed and turned by every imaginable philosophy and opinion, never knowing for sure whether we are 'on the right track' or not. But God

intercedes for us in ways that we can only dimly understand, and God does miracles for us and through us. The Holy Spirit is the way we know God since Jesus has been physically away from Planet Earth for two thousand years. But God has not forgotten us. In fact, the word which our Gospel text translates “Advocate” is the same word used for ‘Consoler’. God comes beside us and consoles us about life’s challenges and difficulties and even helps us rejoice when we have come through some tragedy and are whole again. God is love, and that love is what I think all human beings are in search

of. Love knows all things, yet love does not accuse us of anything but accepts us as we are. Only such a lover could ever possibly change us for the better. Why would we change for someone who did not love us? Why would we listen to someone who did not have our best interests at heart? God does that for us through the Holy Spirit; God has our best interests at heart. Love is the ultimate test of truth. If something is loving, then it is truth. If it is not loving, then it is false. But we need the mind of God to help us discern what is truth, and we trust God because God first loves and loved us. Then

as we trust our human parent from our birth, as we grow older and perhaps our parents are distant or gone, then we rely on the pathway God provides for our lives. God loves us. Therefore, we can trust God with our lives.

At yesterday's royal wedding in England, Presiding Bishop Curry said in his homily: 'love is not just for married couples but part of God's plan [that has] the power to change lives.' 'We must discover love, the redemptive power of love, and when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world.'" "Imagine our neighborhoods and

communities when love is the way. Imagine our governments and countries when love is the way.”

Love is of God, from God, created by God, and offered by God through the Holy Spirit. Let us partake of this divine love by loving each other and all our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Amen.

Description:

The Holy Spirit is a refining fire, testing what we do by God's will and God's ways, but allowing us to have free rule in our lives even to our own detriment. We can do miracles with the power of the Holy Spirit, but we can also do ourselves in if we are stubborn and refuse God's guidance. With Jesus Christ's physical presence now missing, we listen to his words of love and direction as given to us by God's Holy Spirit.

Tags:

Refining, fire, promote, Holy, Spirit, God, Jesus, Christ, church, Old, Testament, New, Philippians, Leviticus, first, fruits, Jewish, law, grace, love, neighbor, Curry, Bishop, wedding, royal, sermon, homily, Advocate, Consoler, Acts, Peter, truth, Messianic, age, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, harvest, Pentecost, fifty, days, Counselor, Joel, Shavuot, Unleavened, Bread, Deuteronomy, Passover, Festival, Weeks, Christianity, Sinai, Exodus, Numbers, Jerusalem, temple, Easter, earth

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 South Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

The Day of Pentecost (B)

May 24, 2015

DRAFT

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

**“Are we ready for the Holy Spirit to work
in us?”**

The Holy Gospel according to

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Jesus said to his disciples, “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. 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. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 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. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Help us, Lord Christ, to experience your holy heat and your holy fire that melts our cold unbelieving and unloving hearts.
Amen.

Someone has noted that defining the Holy Spirit is a bit like defining "time." God's Holy Spirit cannot be defined in the classic understanding of the word "define" because the word "define" means 'to put a boundary around' or 'to put an end to' (from "Synthesis", June 2000). But the Holy Spirit both knows no boundaries and has no end. The Holy Spirit is not just extraordinary power, but super-infinite power, exceeding that of any boundaries we can conceive. And, of course, the Holy Spirit is God as we know God. The medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhard noted that "God is not

attained by a process of addition to anything in the soul, but by a process of subtraction, of dropping things that get in the way."

What will we allow God to subtract from our lives and our lifestyles in order to fill us with the Holy Spirit?

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Here are some powerful thoughts from the Jesuit, John Haughey, about Pentecost.

"Pentecost was a jail break! What had bound the [disciples] was now loosened. Their dancing feet, marveling tongues, and exuberant hearts were the evidence that bound [people] were now free. Free from

what? Free from the images that they had entertained about themselves.”...“The joy of the Kingdom belongs to those to whom it has been given to inhale the truth about themselves.... The limitations that are imposed by each baptized Christian on the power of the Spirit...come not so much from our sinfulness, I suspect, as from our unwillingness to entertain the view of ourselves that God has of us. The Spirit's power in us is meant to provide an alternative to self-definitions that are fallacious and, consequently, un-freeing.”
[John Haughey, *The Conspiracy of God:*

The Holy Spirit in Men. (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 92-93.]

The Holy Spirit can free us, the Holy Spirit can free you! The Holy Spirit will set our feet to dancing, our hearts to joy, and our dreams to become reality. Keep on praying in the Spirit, and the Spirit will come to you, and to us!

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A few years ago, Helen Marshall, one of our senior members at St. John's in Elizabeth, New Jersey, well into her eighties who has long since passed into God's nearer presence confided in me. "Reverend King

(my predecessor) told me a few years ago that we no longer say ‘Holy Ghost’ but now we say, ‘Holy Spirit.’” It was a rather big change for Helen to call the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit; she was a follower of the old Prayer Book, and then of the Rite I Holy Eucharist. The Holy Spirit, however, is like that--as soon as we think we have a ‘handle’ on the Holy Spirit we find the Spirit has eluded us again--so much like God perhaps. A.W. Tozer in “Christianity Today” (May 24, 1999, Page 43) noted that [quote] “the Holy Spirit is a person,...not enthusiasm,...not courage,...not energy,...not

the personification of all good qualities,...actually not the ‘personification’ of anything,...[but] a person” [end quote].

We have difficulty in expressing our affinity to the personhood of the Holy Spirit. So, we may speak as if Christ is present, or we address our prayers to Father God, but we are actually talking to the Holy Spirit who relays our prayers to Christ and his Father. The Holy Spirit is the person of God who is ‘with us’ now that Christ has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. But the invisibility of the Holy Spirit seems to ‘put us off’. We would

rather think of God as creator of heaven and earth. We want to see God as some sort of mighty cosmic force that comes into play when we need to cross the Red Sea or get through a red light. Or more sentimentally we prefer thinking about Christ the Son of God who lived and died as one of us. The Holy Spirit of course cannot be separated from either the Father or the Son, but indeed the Holy Spirit is a separate entity, a separate person, of the Holy Trinity. And hopefully we can be loved by and love the Holy Spirit just as we love and are loved by Jesus, Son of the living God, and his Father,

our heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit is the person of God with us here today. 'It is one thing to know God is love, but quite something else to know we are loved by God,' Pastor Tomas Hilton wrote (from a sermon by C. Thomas Hilton in "Dynamic Preaching," April-June 2000, Page 76).

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Our close neighbor Grace Episcopal Church in Kingston suffered a serious hate crime last Monday night, when anti-Christ, anti-God, graffiti was marked in large letters in crayon on four of the walls in their Narthex, and much other damage was done

to their offices and doors, and the Reserved Sacrament was strewn on the church floor. That is a concrete hate-driven thing that satan would do, and did do, unlike the Holy Spirit who always moves us to do love-filled acts. The contrast between a fallen angel like satan and the Holy God in the form of the Holy Spirit is striking. Satan usually lurks around doing something more difficult to detect, not so open, not so ‘in your face’. So, this particular crime against Grace Church seems to be saying something about how satan is becoming much bolder in our time and in our place.

A couple of unarmed men who fled in a high-speed car chase in Cleveland, Ohio, were killed by a hail of police gunfire of more than 130 bullets November 29, 2012. The incident was incited when the two men's car backfired in front of a Cleveland, Ohio, police precinct, and a multi-vehicle high speed chase ensued. This time in the name of misplaced justice, two innocent deaths occurred. In that instance satan disguised himself in pseudo-justice, egging on those in the service of justice to do a dastardly group unjust crime.

And we see almost weekly incidents where those who are supposed to be acting for justice are being drawn into doing injustice. Clearly, satan is up to his old tricks, now perhaps in a bolder way than we have seen for a while. And these concrete instances of injustice surely grieve God's Holy Spirit.

The question that comes to my mind is what should we do about these things? More pointedly, what should we do about or for our sister parish Grace Church? A number of our parishioners decided to worship with Grace Church this morning to

show our solidarity with them. We all could have gone over, but it seemed more prudent for us to decide as a congregation what our response could or should be first.

One response would be to encourage our Bishop Provisional to write a letter to the City of Kingston and to the Governor of Pennsylvania to show our diocesan solidarity behind Grace Church. What would you suggest the Bishop put in that letter? But, other than urge Kingston and the State of Pennsylvania to ‘try to apprehend those who did this dastardly thing’, what else could the Bishop do?

A few years ago, when a blatantly anti-Semitic action occurred against a nearby synagogue here in Wilkes-Barre, many congregations, both Christian and Jewish, came together around that synagogue and protested such vile behavior. Surely some sort of protest could be in order for Grace Church. Somehow, we need to speak up for them and against the travesty they have suffered. We here have a plan to raise some funds to help them replace or repair some of their losses, which will be a part of the EvenSong service offering here in two weeks on Sunday, June 7. Grace does have

church insurance for these sorts of things, but Grace Church also has a modest deductible which they will have to pay themselves. Suppose someone did the satanic markings on our walls, what would we hope our Episcopal and Christian neighbors would do? Please let your Vestry members hear your thoughts on this issue.

We do need the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit is our consoler, our comforter, our strength in time of need. So, let us offer our heartfelt prayers to the Holy One whose presence we celebrate this very day on Pentecost.

May the tongues of fire that came upon that congregation that first Pentecost Sunday enliven us to speak words that are intelligible, words that speak for truth, words that speak love, in a world too much devoid of love and truth.

May we allow the Holy Spirit to come into our personal and corporate lives to make us more God-like, more compassionate with one another, more loving, bolder.

Those who experienced the Holy Spirit's dynamic presence that first Pentecost went on to change the world, one believer at a

time. May that same holy zeal be in us today, as we feel God's mighty Spirit well up in us today.

Amen.