

Pentecost, Year C

- I was raised in the UMC, which I always say is pretty much like being an Episcopalian with an extra helping of the Holy Spirit
- You see, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, never intended to start a denomination – he was an Anglican clergyman who was convinced by his reading and experience that people in general (and Anglicans in particular) needed to take holiness, or sanctification, a little more seriously
- If people are followers of Christ, his thinking went, someone ought to be able to tell it without having to ask
- This idea of sanctification, of growing in holiness, is considered the realm, the work of the Holy Spirit
- If that's an unfamiliar concept, then that's probably because I think these days we all take both sanctification and the Holy Spirit a little less seriously than we probably ought to
- Like I said at our noon Eucharist this past Wednesday, it turns out that as one of the three persons of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is kind of a big deal
- There are not many moments in the history of our faith where the Holy Spirit isn't obviously and conspicuously at work
- When God the Father was creating the world, we know that everything was created through the eternal Word of God, that is to say, Jesus Christ. But it's the Holy Spirit that hovers over the waters of creation like a mother bird nesting over her young
- When God the Father sends the Angel Gabriel to ask the Virgin Mary to play a part in helping that Word to be made flesh, it is the Holy Spirit that enables the union of humanity and divinity to take place in the person of Jesus Christ
- When Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River and hears God the Father's voice booming from the heavens, "this is my Son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased," it is the Holy Spirit that descends upon Jesus like a dove, to show that blessing from God
- And so when we share in Christ's Baptism, we put on Christ or clothe ourselves in Christ – we too hear God the Father's voice, saying the same thing, "this is my child, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." And the Holy Spirit descends upon us, too – the Spirit of adoption, as Paul calls it in our epistle reading today – "When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"
- It's only by the Holy Spirit working in us that we recognize who God is, are able to cry out

to God as our Father, are able to be adopted by God as God's beloved children and made part of the Body of Christ in Baptism

- And as we continue to grow in our faith, as we are continually, eventually, incrementally formed into the likeness of Christ – that is the Holy Spirit at work in us and on us and among us
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- In just a few minutes, we'll be welcoming another member of the Body, and in our baptismal liturgy, just after that ancient confession of faith known as the Apostles' Creed, there is a series of five questions which round out the Baptismal Covenant
- When I'm doing Baptismal preparation classes, I tell the families of those preparing for Baptism that if you're looking for a good set of bullet points about what the Christian faith is all about, this is a good place to start
- When we talk about sanctification, about becoming more holy and more Christlike, when we talk about allowing the Holy Spirit to work on us, these five questions are what we're hoping the Holy Spirit will do with us and for us and in us – there's a reason the answer to them all is "I will, with God's help"
- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
- Pentecost is the day when the work begun at Easter comes to fruition – and Pentecost is the day when we realize to our chagrin that Christ's resurrection and triumph over death doesn't just assure us a spot in heaven for eternity – but in fact asks us to change now – or, more precisely, asks us to let God change us now – for the better
- We think that we can't, that we have limitations, that we're set in our ways or there's only so much we can do – but this is the Holy Spirit we're talking about – that same Holy Spirit that came upon the disciples this day making a miraculous spectacle of their meager preaching – the one that has already been the agent of the creation of the world and the Incarnation of the Word

- We promise at Baptism to do more than we're capable of, and we acknowledge that fact by saying we'll do it with God's help
- And today, on the day of Pentecost, we realize that God's help is already ours, that the Holy Spirit just keeps showing up, day after day, doing work, all the time, to tell us that God is good and that we can be better
- On Pentecost we realize that the Holy Spirit isn't limited by our shortcomings or even the confines of our imagination – and that there's only one possible answer to the question of whether we'll continue to grow in holiness, so as to shine God's light to the world:
- We will, with God's help