

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today is Spirit day.

Whether it is the violent rush of wind and tongues of flame from Acts,
or the advocate coming to us as the spirit of truth from John;
the creating spirit of Genesis recounted in our psalm,
or the spirit of adoption that bears witness to our status as children of God
that Paul describes in his letter to the Romans;
all are the Spirit.

All are part of what we celebrate today.

And it will be for us

an occasion to remember and renew our own baptism;

To invite the Spirit once again into our midst.

All of this activity

and all the red color splashed around the church

on flames and vestments and clothing;

all of this is evidence of the Spirit at work in our lives.

As someone who has dedicated his life to following the Spirit,

I can tell you that it isn't always easy,

but it is *always* worth it.

Five and a half years ago I was contemplating a journey into central Missouri.

For the first time in my life I would be moving out of the Chicago area

and the prospect of being away from my wife and family,

as well as my home and everything I had known for almost 60 years,

looked grim at the worst,

and only tolerable at best.

Somewhat like the apostle Nathaniel, I wondered,

“Can anything good come out of Jefferson City?”

And somewhat like the apostle Andrew, Sarah Schedler, the head of the search committee bid me “Come and see!”

And even though the separation was as difficult as I thought it would be, to say that my time here was deeply blessed by the Holy Spirit is in my mind a bit of an understatement.

That the Holy Spirit would find a way to get me back here on a more permanent basis never entered my mind. But here I am.

Being a Christian is hard, but it is not without merit.

The vows we take at our baptism, and that we will be renewing today will place us at odds with the easy ways of the world.

When we were baptized, the sign of the cross was marked on our foreheads in chrism, as the following words were spoken.

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

That mark sets us apart.

The work of a Christian is to die daily to self, as Christ died for you.

Easy to say, difficult to do.

That is what the cross is all about.

It is why we take the cross as our symbol.

To remind us, and warn others, that we are different.

Today, as we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit, and ask again for the Spirit to enter into, brood over, and direct our lives, it is important to remember and to be prepared for the change that the Holy Spirit brings.

Be warned, it will turn our world upside down.

A little later in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples,

“And when the Spirit comes,

the Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong

about sin and righteousness and judgment...

about judgment,

because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

The Holy Spirit changes our whole understanding of judgement,

reminding us that in Christ, the ruler of this world has been condemned.

In case you haven't noticed, we live in a world, and even more so in a country,

that judges and values people based on money, power, and strength.

The Spirit reminds us that God sees with different eyes;

that God values and judges differently.

God doesn't care how much money you have,

but how much you give away.

God doesn't care how much power you wield,

but how you wield the power you have been given.

God doesn't care about the strength of your arm,

or the strength of your mind,

or the strength of your will.

God cares about your weakness,

but even more, God cares about how you care for the weak around you.

As followers of the way,

we must learn to care deeply about what God cares about,

and that means a never-ending battle

to extinguish our love of the powers of this world.

It means placing our selves in opposition to those powers.

Again and again we must open ourselves to the gentle urgings of the Spirit,

guiding us into the ultimate truth of God.

Paul captures this struggle eloquently when he says,

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
but you have received a spirit of adoption.

When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’

it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...
if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

The struggle of conforming our lives to Christ,

and living into the depth of our part in the mission of God
is fraught with real suffering.

The end result of this suffering however, is an ecstatic joy,

a joy that fills us to overflowing.

And it too is a joy that overwhelms the pain and risk endured to attain it.

This is the joy that Luke describes in Acts,

and the observers confuse with an alcohol fueled party.

This same joy is accessible to us through the Spirit.

It is what we celebrate especially on this day,

but also what we celebrate to a lesser extent
every Sunday in the Eucharist.

It is the same joy.

The joy of knowing the struggles we face have meaning.

The joy of knowing the suffering we endure is not the end of the story.

I remember a time many years ago backpacking with my youth group

when I was surprised by this kind of joy.

It was the third day of a five day trip,

and we were scheduled to hike 12 miles to the next campground that day.

The journey would take us up a steep hill,

along an exposed ridge,

and then down an escarpment to the campground.

As fate would have it,

it began to rain at about 2 o'clock that morning.

And it rained hard.

By the time we had packed up in the morning and headed out on the trail
we were all pretty miserable.

An hour later we were still miserable,

but now we were literally soaked to the skin as well.

I remember that every time I would take a step

the water would fountain up out of the ankles of my boots.

It continued to rain all day

as our silent band continued to struggle over and around the wet rocks.

As I said, we were pretty miserable at the start of the day,

and I will leave to your imagination

what happened to our mood during that awful day.

But then, something happened around mid afternoon.

I guess we finally figured out that it couldn't get any worse.

(A dangerous thought to have, I know!)

But then we started to laugh.

And boy did we laugh.

We laughed until we couldn't catch our breath.

It was still raining,

but the rain didn't matter any more.

We were still soaked to the skin,

but that didn't matter any more.

Our legs and ankles were still sore from the beating they had taken all morning,

but that didn't matter any more either.

We had been infected by joy!

As we started back on the trail,

the normal chatter that had been absent all morning returned.

One of the youth at the campfire that night

summed it up perfectly.

“After going through this today,
nobody will ever be able to tell me I can’t do something
ever again.”

To find the joy that the Holy Spirit brings to us through faith
is to tap into that deep well of strength
that only comes through weakness.

As we make our way out of the dense jungle that is the COVID pandemic
we have some work ahead of us.

Many of my clergy colleagues are saying
that coming out of the pandemic should be treated like planting a new church.

I’m not sure I would want to go that far,
but I do think we will need to look
at what makes Grace the special place we know and love,
and take a fresh look at what God needs us to be doing here in Jeff City
and how we can go about bringing the special gifts we have been given to this task.

Or to put it a little differently,
the new world we find ourselves in now
will require us to find new ways to be the Grace we have always been.

This will require us to both look carefully at who we are and who we have been,
at the same time that we carefully explore
the needs of our surrounding community.

If we are honest with ourselves
I am sure that we will find ourselves both excited about the possibilities
and anxious about the challenges.

As with all ventures that are important,
it will require the best of us.

And so, on this Pentecost we invite the Holy Spirit to join with *us* as well,
to enlighten our work in the months, and years ahead,

And to craft for us, but even more so for those we minister with and to,
blessings un-numbered, and even un-imagined,
that the kingdom of God will be revealed more clearly
in all its richness and splendor.

This is what we seek.

Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire, and lighten us with celestial fire.

Amen. (Renewal of Baptismal Vows – BCP Pg. 292)