

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, Day of Pentecost, Sunday, May 20, 2018.**

Have you ever felt overwhelmed to the extent you felt powerless or hopeless or inadequate? I think we've all had these feelings. They seem to be part and parcel of the human condition. We like to be in control, but sometimes we are not.

Most of the time, though, we emerge from these not-in-control experiences intact and wiser. The Day of Pentecost is a powerful example.

“When the Day of Pentecost had come” – that is, fifty days after Christ had risen from the dead and ten days after Jesus had ascended – they (the friends, relatives and disciples) were all together in one place. “And suddenly from heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.” **(Acts 2:1-21)**

It was an overwhelming experience, in part because each person began speaking in a language other than his or her own. This caused on-lookers, not from Galilee, to ask, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? What does this mean?”

Some suggested that “they were drunk.” Peter said, “No, they are not drunk. Something else is going on here. God is reminding us that there will be a “great and glorious day, when everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The message here is that good things can happen when we, who love to be in control, are out of control. This is especially true when God, the One who is in control over all that is seen and unseen, loves us and wants the best for us.

The Day of Pentecost was an opportunity for God to remind us, as St. Paul notes in his Letter to the Romans, that “God, who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

“Intercedes on our behalf.” That’s what today is about. From today’s Psalm **(Psalm 104:31)**: “You, God, send forth your Spirit, and, so, you renew the face of the earth.”

This intervention is not of our making. This is God doing once again what we are unable to do by ourselves and for ourselves. We are not able to save ourselves, so God takes on this saving task. And, despite being saved, we manage to separate ourselves from God on a continual basis. So God intercedes again, and again, and again.

You and I are slow to learn. God, on the other hand, is quick to save. How fortunate are we. How blessed are we.

We should not be surprised at this outcome. This is exactly what Jesus said to his disciples, as recorded in today’s Gospel. He knew that his birth, life, death and resurrection, as incredibly powerful as these events were, would need to be supplemented. After all, he was dealing with creatures with short memories regarding their own behavior.

And so Jesus says to the disciples, before the Ascension, “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.” **(John 15:26-27)** Jesus goes on: “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. I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer. 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.”

This is the gift of the Spirit, an extension for ever and ever of the Savior of the World. God sees to it that the gift of His Son is not a one-time wonder, but an all-time inspiration. “For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

You and I take this declaration for granted, don’t we? We don’t think of Jesus as a one-time wonder. For you and me, Jesus is but one expression of a God who remains active in His creation. Father, yes; Son, yes; and Holy Spirit, yes. All three dimensions of God. All three with particular roles to play. All three with the same End in mind, namely the assurance that you and I and anyone else who so

chooses might, in the words of today's Collect, "evermore rejoice in God's holy comfort."

One of the optional lessons for today is from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 37:1-14**). It describes a valley of dry bones. God had a choice. He could leave the bones dry, or he could lay sinews on the bones, and cause flesh to accompany the sinews, and cover the flesh with skin. God chose the latter approach and added one more step. "God put breath in us, so that we might live."

That "one more step," that breath that gives life in a manner that only God can provide, is recognized and celebrated in the Feast of Pentecost. Christmas and Easter, the great Feast Days of the Church Year, have a future because of Pentecost. God in Christ is not a one-time wonder, but an on-going, life-preserving, life-saving presence in our lives.

The Holy Spirit. The third great dimension of the Creator. Absolutely essential to the on-going relationship between you and me and our God. Otherwise, we would be living in the past. Today is not the end. It is just the beginning. God is alive and well and with us.

Yes, this presence can be overwhelming. But it can also be comforting. In our final hymn today (**Hymn #366**), there are several phrases that speak to the enduring nature of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Comforter. From Stanza 1: "everlasting is thy reign." From Stanza 2: "unceasing chorus praising." And from Stanza 3: "from morning till set of sun."

The point is simply that God didn't stop with the Big Bang, and God didn't stop with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus." God kept going. God keeps going. God's love for the Creation is constant and everlasting.

The word "Pentecost" means fifty, as in fifty days following the Resurrection. But the concept of Pentecost means a lot more than fifty. It means "forever." This on-going love of the Creator, this always available inspiration for you and me, is worthy of a very big thank-you. From Stanza 4: "then adoring, bend the knee, and confess the mystery." Amen.

