

Sermon for May 21, 2017

John 14:15-21

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, our crucified and living Lord. Amen

Very typically, we don't talk much about the Holy Spirit until Pentecost Sunday. Usually we reserve the lion's share of our conversation about the Spirit for the celebration of "Birthday of the Church" as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. There the Spirit came like a violent wind, filled the house where the apostles were gathered, appeared among them like tongues of fire, and inspired them all to speak in other languages... so that the crowd assembled outside, Jews from every nation under heaven, heard the commotion and claimed to hear and understand God's word in their own native language.

The Spirit came, Peter preached the sermon of his life, and three thousand persons came to believe and were baptized. That's the story of Pentecost and that's normally when we talk about the Holy Spirit.

But today's Gospel from John makes it clear that we need to talk about the Spirit today...two weeks in advance of Pentecost Sunday. In today's text, Jesus is right in the thick of things trying to reassure his disciples that they'll be OK after he's gone...after he's arrested, crucified, buried, risen and ascended into heaven.

"You'll be OK, boys and girls, I promise. I won't leave you orphaned or unattended. I will make sure that my Spirit is with you...the Spirit of truth, an advocate, who will walk with you just as I have, who will encourage you just as I have, who will speak up for you just as I have, and love you just as I have. This Advocate will have your back. The Advocate will never give up on you. The Advocate will be my comforting presence with you all the days of your life."

I suspect that those words about the Holy Spirit were helpful to the disciples. Knowing that one has an advocate is extremely good news. Knowing that someone is looking out for you. Knowing that someone is walking beside you. Knowing that someone "has your back." In the face of danger or sadness or uncertainty or confusion, there's nothing better than having an advocate on your side...particularly when that advocate looks a lot like Jesus.

I know this to be the case from personal experience.

Twice in recent years, I've been lucky enough to participate in our church's high school backpacking trips in the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming. As you well know, I am not by nature a rugged mountain man or a gung-ho wilderness adventurer. Therefore, I approached each of these backpacking experiences with a fair amount of "fear and trembling." Will I be in good enough shape, at my age, to keep up with the kids? Do I really have what it takes to put up with bad weather, potential injuries, a heavy backpack, wild animals, forest fires, questionable meals, inconvenient bathroom accommodations and a host of other concerns? At times, my excitement about the coming adventure was all but eclipsed by anxiety and self-doubt.

However, the Lord sent an advocate...and his name was Chad Winterfeldt. Mild-mannered organist and beer brewer by day, Chad was the Holy Spirit incarnate for those of us preparing for the Big Horns.

Throughout all of our planning, Chad was there to get us ready. He told us what we might expect. He helped us get into shape. He filled our hearts with excitement.

And once we were under way, all of us rested a little easier because Chad was there...with his voice of experience, his cheerful words of encouragement, his unflagging energy, his infectious respect for Mother Earth, and his ability to center our adventure in God's gracious love for each one of us.

Having an advocate like Chad made all the difference in the world: "Don't worry! We're in this together. I've got your back!" In Chad, we encountered the Holy Spirit, first hand.

This morning, my message is short and sweet. I simply wish to remind you that...

- whenever you stand up for others in Christ's name,
- whenever you bear witness to God's love for all people,
- whenever you speak words of comfort and good cheer,
- whenever you confront power with the truth,
- whenever you advocate for justice and mercy,
- whenever you open your heart to a stranger

**...then and there the Holy Spirit has been at work.** Whenever and wherever you bear Christ's love to the world, the Holy Spirit looks a lot like you.

If I had planned a bit better this morning, I would have hung a full-length mirror on one of the doors leading out of this sanctuary. I would have urged each of you to take a good long look at yourself in the mirror as you leave in order that you might see the Holy Spirit going out into the world to serve and love God's people. For indeed, the truth is that the Holy Spirit works in and through people like you, through hands like yours, through hearts like yours, through words like yours.

This morning, dear friends, as your pastor, I stand here to give thanks that the Holy Spirit looks a lot like you.

In Christ's name, Amen