

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
June 8, 2025 – The Day of Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17, 25-27
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Just before Jesus ascended to heaven forty days after the resurrection, he told his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit to come to them in a few days' time. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit did come in unmistakable ways, like a violent wind and tongues of fire, and in a miracle of language as people spoke in languages they did not know and were understood. From the day of Pentecost until now, the Holy Spirit has been and is at work in the lives of the followers of Jesus and in the church.

Who is the Holy Spirit and what does the Holy Spirit do? That question and its answers are broader and deeper than we can ever comprehend. But we can discover some answers in scripture. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth who bears witness to Jesus Christ as Jesus has borne witness to the Father. As Jesus said to Philip in this morning's reading from the Gospel of John, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus, who loves us, heals us, guides us, purifies us, and redeems us.

How does the Holy Spirit act in human lives? Our experiences and the experiences of others can give us some answers. The Holy Spirit warms our hearts with love for God. The Holy Spirit creates in us a desire to live our lives in conformity with the life and attitudes and teaching of Jesus. The Holy Spirit moves us to become more and more the persons we were created to be – beloved children of God, made in the image of God, made to grow into the likeness of Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit we receive the grace of God that supports this Christian journey, which – we all know – is not a quick or simple journey. The Holy Spirit is present in scripture, the sacraments, prayer, Christian service and much more – all the "means of grace" that move us toward God. The action of the Holy Spirit may be strong and unmistakable, as it was on Pentecost, or it may be as subtle as the "murmur of the dove's song," the "still, small voice of God" we need all our attention to hear. The action of the Spirit is often hidden. Do you remember this parable about the kingdom of God? Jesus said, "To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour [about sixty pounds] until all of it was leavened" (Luke 13:20-21). We cannot see the yeast. We only see its powerful effects.

St. Paul identified many of the effects of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). I have often quoted this list, but today I want to say a few words about what each might mean. I have been guided by the work of Richard Peace, a professor and United Church of Christ minister. I recommend to you his book, "Noticing God: in mystical encounters, in the ordinary, in the still small voice, in community, in creation, and more." He deals with the topic of noticing God in simple, straightforward language and from a good knowledgebase and strong faith.

Peace explores St. Paul's list, advising us to look for the presence (or absence) of these qualities both in ourselves, as a sort of litmus test of our spiritual lives, and as we seek to recognize Christ in others. You may remember that when we renew our baptismal vows, we promise to "seek and serve Christ in all persons." St. Benedict taught that Christ is to be met in other people. How do we recognize the presence of Christ in ourselves and in others?

Love. We affirm our faith that God is Love and that we are called to love. In St. Paul's list, the word used for love is "*agape*," and it means an active reaching out to others in need simply because they are in need, with no expectation of return or reward or even of any response. We might call this altruistic love.

Joy. This is not the same as happiness. Joy is deeper than happiness and can be present in us even when we are in very unhappy circumstances. Such joy is related to our life in God and is connected to hope in God's future for us and for all of God's creation.

Peace. Like joy, this is deeper than contentment and can be ours even in difficult situations. The peace that St. Paul lists as a fruit of the Holy Spirit is the peace that comes from God, from being deeply centered in God, the "peace that passes understanding."

Patience. We might call this type of patience an ability to hold up under stress and to bear with other people who may be in conflict with us, may even persecute us.

Kindness. This is a basic attitude toward others, a way of relating to others with care, compassion, and thoughtfulness for the other person's needs and feelings. When we encounter someone who meets us with kindness, we flourish and respond with our "best selves."

Generosity. This is like kindness and may be seen as a more active expression of the attitude toward others that kindness describes, the free giving to others of what we have.

Faithfulness. The quality of reliability. A faithful person can be depended upon.

Gentleness. This may be defined as the ability to defuse tension or conflict, to put "the good of the order" or of another person before one's own thoughts or feelings.

Self-control. This is the ability to master our compulsion for selfish gratification.

St. Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit is not complete. We might certainly add the qualities of humility and hope, both grounded in scripture. It is a good list to contemplate. We might ask ourselves: Is my faith in Christ leading me to grow in these qualities? Am I cooperating with the Holy Spirit so that, over time, I am embodying and expressing these virtues more fully? The Holy Spirit will gently – and sometimes rather uncomfortably – lead us to become individuals whose lives show forth these and other qualities of grace. The Holy Spirit will lead us to see with Christ's eyes, to love as Christ loved, to serve others in Jesus' name.

I have described the work of the Holy Spirit in Christian terms. But we must remember that when we speak of the Holy Spirit, we are speaking of God, who is never limited by human traditions or human understanding. The Holy Spirit surely is at work in the lives and traditions of people who are not Christian. When we see what we have called the effects of the Holy Spirit in people's lives, we may say that God has been at work. Think of the words of the Eucharistic Prayer from *Enriching Our Worship*, when we pray: "in the fullness of time bring us, with all your saints, from every tribe and language and people and nation, to feast at the banquet prepared from the foundation of the world." We know that God has called us to be followers of Jesus. We don't know all the ways God calls others to be God's saints.

Wherever our paths may lead, may the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us to become the loving people God desires us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.