

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,
Gibson Island, Maryland on Pentecost, May 19 2024.**

Pentecost. One of the scariest Sundays of the Church Year.

Why scary? Because, in a sense, we are now on our own. Jesus has been with us from conception to death to resurrection. He was flesh and blood. But now he's not here physically. The Son has returned to the Father. And we are left with the Spirit.

Which is not a bad thing, mind you, except that it's different. Oh yes, Jesus is still Jesus. The human side of God with whom we can and do relate. He was fully human. Just as we are fully human. Jesus was one of us, and we of him. A teacher, a friend, a neighbor, a model of humanity. A person we admired because he lived as we live. Far more impressive, yes, but still like us. Comfortable.

But physically he has left us, and returned to us in a different manner. As Holy Spirit. And it is different. It takes some getting used to. He doesn't visit us in the same way. He gets under our skin, as it were. He gets in our head and in our heart. He's with us all the time. But we don't shake hands. We observe the Lord's Supper, yes. We end our prayers with His Name, yes. We even feel his presence, not only in our lives, but also in dimensions that are way beyond our comprehension.

These changes are all for the good, but things **are different**, aren't they. But, you know what. It's for the best. It's something to celebrate, not fear. What we should fear is God not being with us in a manner we can appreciate. Imagine God being beyond us. Forcing us to live without direction. Birth without meaning or purpose or curiosity or commitment.

Who needs that? Well, fortunately we don't have to worry. Because God makes sure that He remains in our heads and hearts. Even if we wanted to forget God, we couldn't do so. Not now. The Holy Spirit has arrived. God changed clothes. Same Power. Same expectations. But now with a Holy Spirit bound in our heart and souls, a Spirit who is by our side throughout our lives. No ignoring this Spirit.

That's the **Good** News. But it is also the Expectation News. We have work to do.

We have an assignment. Namely to stay tuned to God, via God's Gift of the Spirit. The homework just doesn't stop. But neither does the Joy of the Love of God in a brand new manner.

Now, this Divine Gift carries some expectations. Even for God, maybe especially for God, there is no Free Lunch. Well, that's not quite right. The Lunch is Free, but God doesn't make us eat the Lunch. He serves it. But it's up to us to take it in and use that energy to share the Love of God.

Yes, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, our relationship with the Creator has changed dramatically. We see this transition in the lives of the disciples. Their courage, their faithfulness, their dedication changed the world. It didn't solve all of the world's problems, but their faith modeled how you and I, centuries later, would understand **our** purpose in the scheme of things. We are to serve the Lord. We are to obey. We are to demonstrate what it means to be the kind of creature God wants us to be and expects us to be. Today's **Collect** uses this language: "Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort."

So, yes, there is more work to do. From today's Psalm: "You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth." (**Psalm 104:31**) But how special to be given this assignment by God and given the inner strength to fulfill the assignment by receiving the Holy Spirit and sharing that Spirit.

You and I, in this setting, love Divine Homework. That's what we sign up for, but not without the assurance that God will give us the strength and guidance to fulfill that Homework. That strength and guidance has a name: God the Holy Spirit. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans reminds us that "the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (**Acts 8:27**) God asks a lot of us, but also provides a lot of support.

And it's on the Feast of Pentecost that we honor the Spirit by opening our minds and hearts to what the Spirit asks of us. And what we are capable of with the Spirit's guidance. Jesus may have left us in one way. But he remains with us – even stronger – as Spirit. What the Gospel of John describes as "**the Advocate.**" (**John15:26**)

So, if we felt that we were through with God, we were wrong. God wasn't, isn't, through with us. **Welcome to Pentecost.** Fifty days after Easter for Jesus the Man. But unending days with God for you and me. "Not so fast," God says, as we try to leave. "I've got more for you to do, and I have just the Power you need to do it. Please welcome your new Best Friend, God the Holy Spirit."

"And, so that you don't forget this conversation, I expect you to gather every year at this time to see how you're doing with your New Spirit. My Old Spirit, but your New Spirit. Buckle up. The fun, the excitement, the creativity, is just beginning. I know you miss Jesus the Man. But don't worry for him. He is with the Father. And through him, so are we.

"As are you" God says. I'm not going anywhere. Just adding a dimension. A Spirit-filled dimension. That is **Spirit with a capital S**. Whose job it is to keep the Son very much alive in your hearts and minds and deeds.

And here we are. Creator and creature **still** together. And very much alive. With lots of work ahead – "labor pains" according to Paul (**Romans 8:22-27**). Not to worry, though. We are in Great Company. May the Spirit be with you and with us.

Amen.