

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

May 23, 2021  
The Day of Pentecost, Year B

The readings this week:

- Acts 2:1-21 ◦ Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
- Romans 8:22-27 ◦ John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Come Holy Spirit! Really?

"Come, Holy Spirit!" We use these words often in worship. Sometimes we say them with vigor and enthusiasm. On other days we may mouth the syllables from the depths of distraction. Either way, I wonder whether we really know what we're asking for, what we're praying for, when we invoke the Spirit's name.

Some might say we're playing with fire when we're talking about the Spirit, and that we're messing with a wind mighty enough to huff and puff and blow the whole house down. Yep, we may feel all snug and secure in our houses of worship, cozy in our rituals and traditions and history, but the Spirit of God refuses to be confined or conformed. The Holy Spirit comes not only to comfort and guide us, but to liberate and goad us.

And so it is Pentecost once again. People of God get ready: The Holy Spirit is at work doing a new thing, re-forming us as church, reigniting our passion and fire for the gospel, and giving us a new language that speaks to this age, our time, and our contexts. All we have to do is let go of the dry bones that hold us back and confine us to dusty glory of some former decade. All we have to do is be willing to risk everything and dream dreams, see visions, and speak prophetic words of hope, grace, and love that fly in the face of the status quo.

Paul writes that we, along with all of creation, have been pregnant with possibility, with this hope-full promise of Spirit life so amazing that even our prayers are spoken by the Advocate when we cannot find the words to name our deepest needs and pain. This is powerful stuff. We have been blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, a gift that keeps on giving and living and speaking truth. And yes, sometimes the truth is hard to hear, harder to tell, and harder still to live. But this is our calling as God's beloved and as followers of Jesus.

Yes, it is Pentecost once again, and this time we stand on the brink of what scholar and author Phyllis Tickle calls "the Great Emergence." It seems that every 500 years or so, the Holy Spirit comes in and cleans house, dismantling structures that have become tired and crumbling, upsetting the church's patterns and expectations, and digging out entrenched configurations and institutions. We can rest assured that God is always up to something new and fresh,

and when we feel these Holy Spirit, we had better get on board for the ride because God's work and reconciliation of creation will happen with or in spite of us.

I imagine those first disciples were wholly unsettled by the events of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. I'm sure they puzzled over his teachings, his prayer for them, and his seemingly cryptic instructions about this Advocate who was coming. Perhaps they felt ill-prepared for the task at hand. Maybe they feared that their security in the law and their temple/synagogue practice and tradition would unravel. Being on the margins must have been terrifying, but still they kept on hoping and trusting imperfectly. And then it was Pentecost with tongues of fire, rushing winds, words aplenty, and the power of all that had been prophesied unfolding around them. How truly amazing that must have been! What energy must have sparked their faith and practice! We know what happened next, and it was truly amazing.

This week perhaps it's time to explore the possibility that we're standing on the verge of our own Pentecost experience, that truly God is doing a new thing in our world. In another decade the mainline church as we know it will probably look significantly different. That's frightening, especially for those of us who don't do change well. What we must remember is that we are not alone. Jesus has sent the Advocate, and this Holy Spirit will guide us into truth. This is our promise. This is our Easter reality. This is our abundant hope. So, indeed, come Holy Spirit, come! Yes, really! Amen.

~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship of Life](#)



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: [Acts 2:1-21](#)

Why are wind and fire such powerful examples of God's presence? Who was present in Jerusalem, and why? In light of this, why was the day of Pentecost such a perfect time for the coming of the Holy Spirit? The miracle at Pentecost was, above all, a "miracle of understanding." We don't know if the miracle was in the Christians' ability to speak, or in the people's ability to hear. Which do you think it was? Does it matter? Not only do we see an expansion of the kinds of people who can receive the Gospel, we also see an expansion of the kinds of people who can give the Gospel. Why do you think some people refer to Pentecost as the "birthday of the Church"? For what purpose did God cause the "miracle of understanding" to happen at Pentecost? How might God employ a "miracle of understanding" today? How might God be prompting us to expand the Gospel beyond our own social and religious boundaries? What unexpected people might God be calling to do this work? [Faith Element](#)

## Psalm Reading: [Psalm 104:24-34, 35b](#)

Verse 27 declares that every single aspect of creation depends upon the Lord. In what ways is this statement true? What would life on this earth be like if the Lord did not sustain it? Why would the writer's reflection on God's life-sustaining work in creation lead to a reflection upon the work of the Lord's Spirit in our lives? How is our view of nature different from the unbeliever's? As we study astronomy, physics, chemistry, or biology, do we experience the wide-eyed wonder of the child discovering His Father's amazing creations? Over time, do we experience more wonder or less wonder at God's creation? [Ken Castor, Generations](#)



## Praying Toward Sunday

And now,  
send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.  
Amen.

~ Post communion prayer, page 366, American (1979)  
Book of Common Prayer

Pentecost reminds us that Christ's spirit is not mild or temperate but a disrupting force, a caring love that disconcerts and unsettles the systems of this world, redefining power from the inside out and from the bottom up. We usually think and act in terms of continuities, predictability, repetition of schemes and plans, and the Pentecostal event show us God's capacity to interrupt, to break those schemes open, and to violate those formulae: it is a bold and risky spirit, even disobedient, when it is a matter of uncovering new paths of life.

~ Ivan Nicoletto OSB Cam. unpublished sermon, Pentecost, 2019, via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

Lord  
Take me where you want me to go,  
Let me meet who you want me to meet  
Tell me what you want me to say,  
and keep me out of your way.

~ The Rev. Mychal Judge O.F.M. d. 9/11/2001

## 3rd Reading: [Romans 8:22-27](#)

Why do you think Paul mentions it if believers today still "groan" just as the human race always has? Is thinking about heaven and who you will become when you are finally with Jesus face-to-face something you ever think about? If you do think about it, how does thinking about it help you? The Message version says in verse 25, "That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy." What are some ways that the act of waiting helps to change you, grow you, or teach you? What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us through suffering and times of waiting? How does knowing that the Holy Spirit is pleading before your Heavenly Father on your behalf bring you comfort and hope? [Cornerstone Fellowship](#)

## 4th Reading: [John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15](#)

How do you fight discouragement when you face rejection from the world? What does Jesus say the Spirit will do? Why is Jesus telling the disciples these tough truths? What are things that Jesus says the Spirit will do regarding the world, Christians and Jesus? Consider various words we have to describe this third person of the Trinity (Advocate, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, Comforter, wind). Which one(s) resonate for you? Jesus spoke these words to the disciples before the crucifixion. Consider how they might have "understood" what he was saying then – and what these words might have meant to the disciples after Pentecost. When do we believe we receive access to the Holy Spirit? [Prestonwood Church, Lesson Plans that Work](#)