

Come Alongside Holy Spirit
King of Glory Lutheran Church
Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry
Pentecost! Year B: John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15
May 18-19, 2024

15:26 "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. ²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

16:4b "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: 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. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

"Surely the Presence of the Lord" United Methodist Hymnal #328ⁱ

When I was in college, there was a wonderful Lutheran campus pastor. Because I was baptized Christian, but in the Methodist denomination, I wanted to know as much as I could about Lutheran theology. Therefore, I regularly attended daily Chapel services and listened to Pastor Bruce preach and teach.

But all of my best friends went every Wednesday night to a Bible study lead by a charismatic pastor in a large fireside room of a dorm on the far side of campus. His Bible studies were so popular, there would be 50 to 60 students there every single week. My friends raved about his teachings and the fellowship that they shared there. I knew just enough about charismatic ministry to be fearful of it. Not wanting to trust my feelings but only my intellect, I stayed away. But one night my friends convinced me to go.

It came time for the prayers, and the pastor began praying with arms up raised along with many of the students. I was sitting as far away from him as I could get, my back against a wall. The pastor began saying, "Lord Jesus, there is someone

here tonight who is feeling frightened. This person wants to trust, but cannot.” He continued on and he could have been describing 20 students in the room. But I knew within my heart, without a doubt, that he was talking about me. The longer he prayed describing this “person”, the more scared I got. I stayed quiet, even though the Pastor strongly urged whoever it was to come to the front of the room to be prayed over. Yeah right, hell no! For me it was very unsettling. And yet I knew without a doubt that it was God. God, through the Holy Spirit had given that pastor the words to touch my heart. At the time I had no idea how. Years later, I understood that God was revealing Godself to me in a new way... through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe like me when I was in college, when you think about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, it just sounds weird or strange. Perhaps you don't think about the person of the Holy Spirit very much because when you call out to God you either use the name of God or you use the name of Jesus or Lord; the first and second persons of the Trinity.

Maybe when you've been cruising TV channels or YouTube, you've seen worship services where people are “slain in the spirit” or “speaking in tongues,” and it looks amazing and not at all like prescribed worship we have, where either the bulletin or the pastor tells you when to sit down and stand up. Ohh yes, we can keep our feelings in check in worship...if we wish.

Yet here's the truth, we just heard Jesus tell the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. The spirit would be the comforter, the advocate, the guide. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit was called the Paraclete; literally the one to ‘come alongside’, just as Jesus had been alongside His disciples. This Holy Spirit would never depart or leave them even though He, Himself was getting ready to depart the world.

Throughout scripture the Spirit has been present. In the beginning the Spirit of God moved over the waters in creation. God anointed King David with the spirit. Prophets were given the spirit to speak to God's people messages that they desperately needed to hear. When the people of Israel were in exile and lamenting, the spirit blew through them like a wind raising up a valley of dry bones. Mary became pregnant through the Holy Spirit and Simeon was told by the Spirit he wouldn't die without seeing God's Son. Paul in the book of Romans says that we don't know how to pray, the spirit prays on our behalf; interceding with sighs too deep for words. (Romans 8:26) He writes in 1 Corinthians 14 about the gift of speaking in tongues and how it builds up a body of believers. ‘One who

speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also...' (1 Cor 14:13) We know that the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5 are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The Holy Spirit is real, my friends! The Holy Spirit is real and she is a wise one!

What happens on this day, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all believers. The spirit of God as was prophesied by Joel, has come now to every man, woman, and child. If you think you do not have the Holy Spirit within you, think again! At baptism we pray for the Spirits indwelling. Let us rejoice in the gift of the third person of the Trinity, the holy spirit! We rejoice, that the Holy Spirit comes to give us guidance, wisdom, direction, gentle nudges towards God.

Far be it from me to know the mind and the workings of God. Yet, with the four-legged stool of faith: scripture, history, tradition, and experience; over time we begin to know and trust the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I know many of you have experiences of the Holy Spirit as well. They may not be as dramatic as that first Pentecost when everyone in the crowd could understand all of the languages, yet that doesn't negate the power of the Spirit's work within us. Maybe you wake up in the morning with a Christian song or a hymn, or pieces of the liturgy running through your mind. And after 15 or 20 seconds your conscious mind realizes that you are hearing a song.

Have you ever had a really sad or tragic situation happen to you? Then in the midst of that experience, there comes a piece over you, peace like being wrapped up in a warm blanket on a cool night. It shouldn't be there. It doesn't make any sense, and yet it does.

A woman had only been married a little over a year and was pregnant with their first child. Her husband died without warning. Oh there was sadness, but she continued to exude calm and peace all the way through the funeral. Over and over she said to people who tried to comfort her, "He is safe in God's arms and so am I." Thank you, Holy Spirit, the comforter, the come-alongside-one.

Have you ever been thinking of someone and then they call you? Or you call them and they say, "I was just thinking about you!" Some might chalk that up to intuition or the cosmos. I believe, God needs you to have a conversation and the Holy Spirit moves you go and call that person. For God's Holy Spirit is a life-giving presence always connecting us in relationship with God and one another.ⁱⁱ

What about when you are reading your Bible and suddenly you get new insight into a situation in your life from the words on the page. It is as if, God Godself had directed you to that passage for your greater understanding. Here's the truth. To detect the Spirit's teaching, think about tuning your spirit like tuning to a radio station. We listen with our inner ear. That can take some practice to develop.

The Holy Spirit moves in individual ways and communal ways as well. Have you ever been in a worship service when even the babies get quiet? Come, Holy Spirit come. Or when a congregation prays weeks at a time to discern that very next right step they are to take. They embark on a building campaign and new families flock to the building. A church decides to start a soup kitchen or food pantry and suddenly they are known in the community and people's lives are being enriched in very real ways. Come, Holy Spirit, come!

I pray that if you are comfortable with the Holy Spirit, that Spirit will continue to dwell ever more deeply in your relationship with God. And I pray if the Spirit is still a foreign entity, that strange third person of the Trinity, that you too will begin to listen for those nudgings of God who comes alongside for an ever-deepening relationship with God. To begin, you can pray, 'Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come Holy Spirit, come. Come, Holy Spirit, come.'

Finally, I invite you to repeat after me a closing prayer by Eric Milner-White who lived in England in the 1900's.

O God, the Holy Spirit,
Come to us, and among us;
come as the wind, and cleanse us;
come as the fire, and burn;
come as the dew, and refresh;
convict, convert, and consecrate
Many hearts and lives
To our great good
And to thy greater glory;
And this we ask for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

(United Methodist Hymnal #335 By permission of SPCK)ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ The United Methodist Hymnal; Book of United Methodist Worship. The United Methodist Publishing House. Nashville, TN. 1989.

ⁱⁱ <https://enterthebible.org/who-is-the-holy-spirit-lois-malcolm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid endnote i