

**Pentecost**  
**Romans 8:14-17 | John 14:8-17, 25-27**  
**June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019**  
**The Rev. John Forman**

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Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

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The drama of Luke's story about the Day of Pentecost can overshadow Paul's letter and the Gospel lesson. Our first reading from Acts features dazzling elements of violent wind and tongues of fire, not to mention people suddenly able to speak new languages.

These fantastic images make it difficult to stay focused on what's at the heart of this amazing story. As enchanting and exciting as a Harry Potter version of Pentecost might be, there is something more genuine, more reliable about the story of Pentecost. Beneath the sights and sounds of chaotic winds and flames from the sky, at the core of the story, is a reality that is both far more humble and yet endlessly more incredible.

Like the ordinary reality of John's very human story about a follower of Christ who has somehow missed the plot.

In a few minutes, we will turn our attention to the baptismal font where I will once again, on behalf of the congregation, offer to God the "Thanksgiving over the Water" that tells of God's creating acts. I'll evoke the stories of the Spirit that moved over the face of the deep, the liberation of God's people from bondage in Egypt and the baptism of Jesus. Each of us can think of our own baptism story when we were reborn by the Holy Spirit.

Then we will renew our baptismal promises to God. We'll renew the covenant through which we are adopted as God's children. In that way, we

update our participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; we continue moving through the darkness that leads to new light where we renew and reorient our one precious life.

“All who are led by the Spirit of God,” Paul says, “are children of God.” And because we are God’s own children, the Holy Spirit motivates us to find purpose and inspires us to tell our story.

The new life we are granted through our baptisms is more fulfilling than a life of ease; more gratifying than a life in the pursuit of security. Participation in the life of the Risen Christ is a deeper life of meaning.

“When we cry, ‘Abba! Father’,” Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “the Spirit itself testifies along with our spirit that we are God’s children.” We are loved and valued for who God created us to be – who we most deeply are – not for what believe or who we reject. And we promise to God that we will do our best, with God’s help, to bond with each other by respecting the dignity of every human being, by loving our neighbor *as they are*, just as we love ourselves as we are in the same way that God loves all God’s children.

The resurrection life that God gives us through our baptism liberates us to pursue a life of purpose. Finding purpose is not always the same as finding a job or a vocation. Purpose is about what we *give away* in service to others and that often changes as we go through life stages and circumstances.

The impulse to find and express purpose is the fire of the Holy Spirit within us seeking Christ in those around us. It is, in a word, Love.

Some find holy purpose in their parenting, in caring for a loved one or other more intimate ways. Others find purpose in more public ways.

There is a classical pianist in New York City named Colin Huggins. About four times a week, rain or shine, Colin pushes an 800-pound Steinway grand piano from his apartment through the subway to Washington Square Park. Once he is set up and begins to play, he watches and listens for the emotions of people in the crowd as a way to bond with them by sharing music that offers meaning to them and to himself.

When he finds someone having a particularly difficult day, he invites them to lay beneath the piano as he plays the music of their choice. People describe it as a transcendent experience that routinely brings them to tears of joy. “My life’s work, my passion,” Colin says, “is ultimately to provide amazing musical experiences to as many people as I can before I die.”

God has purposes for every person. No one is unnecessary or too small. No one is extra. No one is inadequate or incapable of giving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Let me tell you a story about Ana García Manzananas.

Ana was a poor shepherdess living in 16<sup>th</sup> c. Spain, near Ávila. When she was 20 years old, she applied to enter the Carmelite monastery, newly reformed under the leadership of Sr. Teresa. Most of the community at the time came from educated, well-off families, but Ana could only sign her name with the mark of a cross. Even so, Teresa discerned Ana's gifts and accepted her as a secular sister.

When she eventually made solemn vows, Ana took the religious name "Anne of St. Bartholomew" and became the inseparable assistant, caregiver and traveling companion of St. Teresa of Ávila. And it was on one of those trips when the saintly reformer of the Carmelites and Doctor of the Church died in Anne's arms.

Some years later, the Carmelites chose Anne to join a group of five sisters to establish a house in Paris, where she eventually became the prioress. She later founded a daughter house in Antwerp. In her reluctance to accept a position of authority, Anne protested that she was no more than a weak straw. But Christ spoke to her in her prayers, reminding her, "It is with straws that I light my fire."

And so it is with most of us. The fire of the Holy Spirit is lit with weak straws more often than with howling winds, plummeting fire and people speaking languages they don't know.

Most of us have stories more like Philip's in John's Gospel.

Philip was one of the first of the original 12 called by Jesus and he was at the wedding at Cana. He is now seated at the last supper where Jesus has just given them a new commandment to love one another. And yet, after all this experience with Jesus, *still* Philip says, "Show us God and that will be enough for us." And Jesus replies, "Have I been so long a time with you, and you do not know me, Philip?"

I can imagine Philip slapping his forehead and wishing he'd said something – *anything* – more insightful or clever. Fortunately for Philip, and for you and me, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, surrounds us with compassion and forgiveness. All that and the peace of Christ are given to us and *not* as the world gives.

I recognize myself in Philip's story. Because, while I'm getting better at catching the Spirit in action, I do much better in retrospect. Reflection allows me to revisit some of the stories I have been telling myself and then I can begin to see patterns of God's influence that I couldn't see at the time.

Because the Holy Spirit abides with us and is in us, reminding us what Jesus taught, we can all look back at turning points in our lives, both heart-opening and painfully difficult, and see that these events have become a part of who God is continually creating us to be.

And so, instead of fixating on what could have been, we can take fearless courage from Holy Spirit and embrace what is real and who we truly are. By revisiting chapters of our life story, we can often find the redemption God has already granted, even if we couldn't recognize it at the time. And in the loving energy of the Holy Spirit, we can recast the stories we tell ourselves as stories of new life.

That's what we celebrate at Pentecost, whether we are long-time disciples, gifted musicians or weak straws. We are all of us, children of God. And we are filled with the Holy Spirit who energizes our purpose and inspires us with awe at God's creation so that we can participate anew in the stories of God's love.

"Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity," Pierre Teilhard De Chardin once wrote, "we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, [humanity] will have discovered fire."

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