

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

MAY 23, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA



PRELUDE *Come Down, O Love Divine* Setting: Raymond H. Haan

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #501 *Come Down, O Love Divine*

1 Come down, O Love divine;

Seek Thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with Thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near;
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,

Till worldly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let Thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path
illuming.

3 Let holy charity

Mine outward vesture be
And lowliness become mine inner clothing—
True lowliness of heart,
Which takes the humbler part,
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.

4 And so the yearning strong,

With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the pow'r of human telling;
No soul can guess His grace
Till it become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling.

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Since we are gathered to hear God's Word and call upon Him in prayer and praise, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Almighty God, merciful Father, in Holy Baptism You declared us to be Your children and gathered us into Your one, holy Church, in which You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

HYMN OF PRAISE #498 Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest

- 1 Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
And make our hearts Your place of rest;
Come with Your grace and heav'nly aid,
And fill the hearts which You have made.
- 2 **To You, the Counselor, we cry,
To You, the gift of God Most High;
The fount of life, the fire of love,
The soul's anointing from above.**
- 3 In You, with graces sevenfold,
We God's almighty hand behold
While You with tongues of fire proclaim
To all the world His holy name.
- 4 **Your light to ev'ry thought impart,
And shed Your love in ev'ry heart;
The weakness of our mortal state
With deathless might invigorate.**
- 5 Drive far away our wily foe,
And Your abiding peace bestow;
With You as our protecting guide,
No evil can with us abide.
- 6 **Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And You, from both, as Three in One
That we Your name may ever bless
And in our lives the truth confess.**
- 7 **Praise we the Father and the Son
And Holy Spirit, with them One,
And may the Son on us bestow
The gifts that from the Spirit flow!**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. O God,

on this day You once taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending them the light of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us in our day by the same Spirit to have a right understanding in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy consolation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 139:1-12

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 15th and 16th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

On this festival day of Pentecost, we celebrate the fulfillment of the promise given in the Gospel lesson just read. Jesus had told his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit upon them following his return to the Father. In today’s reading from Acts we hear of this sending. The sending was a miraculous outpowering of the Spirit – evidenced by tongues of fire, communications across different languages, and the conversion of thousands who heard the message that day and believed.

And let us remember, too, that the occurrences of that day also fulfilled promises given earlier by God. It fulfilled the promise given through the prophet Joel which was mentioned in today’s Acts reading. It also fulfilled the prophecy from Ezekiel contained in our first reading.

These fulfillments show us how significant the giving of the Spirit on that Day of Pentecost was. God had always sent his Spirit to people and situations as was needed, but the Spirit’s giving on that day made an impact beyond all the others. Today we remember this great giving of the Spirit. And celebrate.

And because we focused on the readings from John’s Gospel during this past Easter Season, I’d like us to continue this pattern and again focus this part of our celebration on the reading from John.

One of the first things we notice in this text is that Jesus refers to the Spirit using two different names. First, he calls the Spirit the “Helper.” And then he calls the Spirit the “Spirit of Truth.” Which raises the question: Why does he use these two different names? And what is he trying to tell us?

When Jesus calls the Spirit the Helper, he is using a word without much history among God’s people. The Greek word is *paraclete*. There is only one other use of that word in the New Testament, and that is in 1 John 2, where John is referring to Jesus. Here we normally translate the word as advocate. John says: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John then adds: “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

And this usage reflects the history of its use in the legal world of the Greeks. Jesus our advocate is the one who makes things right before our heavenly Father, who is also our Judge.

Yet, in that legal world of the Greeks, the *paraclete* was not always the chief advocate or lawyer. Often the *paraclete* was the main advocate’s helper. And that is no doubt one reason that the version we read today translates the word as Helper. Using this word distinguishes between the advocacy Jesus gives us through his death on the cross and the help that the Spirit gives.

But I’m sure there’s another reason that our translation also chose that word. Helper is a more general word. It’s not as specific. And that pays homage to the history of the church’s other translation choices.

You see, in addition to Advocate and Helper, the church has sometimes used the word Counselor. A counselor, as we know, is a helper in certain, specific ways. Some counselors give legal help. Others give help related to one’s personal health and well-being. Jesus’ followers certainly needed both.

Interestingly, many in the early church started to go a very different direction in translating the word. They started to use the idea of comfort. The King James Version reflects that history of translation by calling the Spirit the Comforter. Sometimes the Spirit would even be called the Holy Comforter. You may know the church in Vienna which bears that name. This word choice no doubt reflects the fact that Jesus was saying these words to help the disciples overcome the pain and uncertainty of his leaving. He would send the Spirit to comfort them after their loss. Makes sense.

And there have been other word choices as well. One modern translation (The Message) chooses to describe the Spirit here as a Friend. Perhaps that choice was made because Jesus called the disciples his friends just a few verses earlier. Others have suggested that we could call the Spirit a Guide. Jesus does say that the Spirit will guide his disciples into all the truth. And finally, some translations simply give us the Greek word *Paraclete* and make us translate it ourselves.

As important as it is to try and find the best word for translation when putting the Scriptures into a different language, it seems to me that in this case we can benefit from having different choices. I say this because they all shed light on what the Spirit does. And indeed, the Spirit’s work is multi-faceted.

When I think of the Spirit as the Helper, I am reminded of the times when about all I can muster in prayer are just simple pleas for God to help me. These are the times when I’m frustrated or unsure and I don’t really even know what to pray for, but I still believe that prayer will help me. In these times, I am grateful to know that God’s Spirit is interceding for me and assisting me. God, says the Psalmist, is our “refugee and strength – an ever-present help in times of trouble.” When my spirit fails me – and even words are too difficult – I know the Holy Spirit is still extending me help. Sometimes I use the simple plea: “Lord, have mercy.” Sometimes I simply utter, “Lord, help me. Help me.”

Likewise, when I am wracked with guilt because of my sin, or saddened by its hold on me, I am grateful to know that I have an Advocate with the Father. Jesus is that advocate who has paid for my sin. And the Spirit is that advocate who reminds me of my forgiveness. The Spirit, of course, is somehow also the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Father. They are all one. We will celebrate that unity next

Sunday. Still, there is something about knowing of the Spirit's presence around and within us – working through the Word, working through the Church – which speaks to God's presence in ways that are particularly helpful. How wonderful it is to know that the God who judges our sins also advocates for us.

What's more, knowing that the Spirit is our Comforter is also a great blessing. And especially at times like these past couple of weeks – when our congregation has just lost two great saints from our presence (Paul and Gladys). In our grief, we are blessed to have a Comforter attend to us. The Spirit comforts us by recalling the promise of the resurrection. The Spirit comforts us by remembering God's promises to care for and console us. As God once sent the prophet Isaiah to "comfort, comfort ye my people," so also the Spirit goes forth and extends God's comfort every time we call upon him.

In the same way, the Spirit as Counselor reminds us that God sends his wisdom. The Spirit as Friend reminds us that he is accessible and on our side. The Spirit as Guide reminds us that he will lead us in ways that are right and true.

Speaking of truth, that is the second name for the Spirit given special mention by our Lord Jesus. After calling the Spirit the Paraclete, Jesus then calls him the Spirit of Truth.

And just to be extra clear here, in the Greek there is a definite article placed before truth. So, the Spirit is literally the Spirit of the Truth. And while this may be a minor distinction – perhaps given simply for emphasis – it should still remind us that there is one truth here which the Spirit is more concerned about than all the others. The Spirit wants us to know the truth about Jesus Christ. "He will bear witness about me," said Jesus.

Knowing of this concern, we should think deeply about which truth about Jesus the Spirit wants us to know.

In John's Gospel, as we have discovered these past weeks, there is a strong push for us to know the truth about Jesus' identity. His words and actions tell us he is not just another prophet. Nor is he just another teacher. He is, in fact, one with the Father.

But is this the only truth we are to discover?

In our text, we later hear Jesus say that the Spirit will "guide" his disciples "into all the truth." We note the inclusion of the definite article here once again. And we also note the word "all." Apparently, according to the use of that word, there are multiple aspects of the truth that the Spirit will teach the disciples of Jesus.

And notice, too, that these aspects seem to be things that Jesus has not told them yet, for he says: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

Some have interpreted these words of Jesus to mean that he will continue to reveal new things to them. These interpreters are the ones who believe the church should continue to be led by prophets who receive new messages about the faith, or ones who believe that the faith will be ever evolving.

But the words of Jesus here are better understood as pointing to the explanation which the Spirit will need to give once Jesus has died and been resurrected. Jesus had often told them to keep quiet about what they had seen and often pointed out their lack of understanding. Once Jesus had completed his journey via the cross, tomb and ascension to the Father, then they would be ready to understand the full truth Jesus intended for them.

And that is what happened. Once the Spirit came at Pentecost, Jesus' followers clearly understood what his death and resurrection meant. They preached about it immediately. And they saw all of his teachings in light of those events.

The truth that Jesus wants us to know is that there is forgiveness of sins in his name. His death and resurrection have made it possible. Under the direction of the Spirit, Peter shared this on the day of Pentecost by quoting the prophet, saying: "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Saved from their sin. Saved from the curse of death.

Certainly, all the teachings of Jesus are truths that the Spirit wants us to know. But the truth of salvation in his name is the one truth which surpasses all others. It is the one which helps the most. It is the one which gives the counseling and advocacy we need above all. It is the one which truly comforts.

The Lord Jesus has sent the Spirit to guide us into this truth. This truth is our way and our life. Following Jesus and trusting in the Spirit, may we be kept in that truth for all of our days. Amen

HYMN OF THE DAY #847 Christ, Our Human Likeness Sharing

**1 Christ, our human likeness sharing,
Heaven's love on earth portrayed;
Christ the Shepherd, tending, caring,
In His death our ransom paid:
Christ the Savior, Christ the Servant,
Be Your life in us displayed.**

**2 Hear the word that Christ has spoken,
Help the weak, the hungry feed;
See the pow'rs of darkness broken,
Sinners pardoned, captives freed:
Christ the Savior, Christ the Servant,
Help us meet our neighbor's need.**

**3 Christ, in ev'ry congregation
Build Your temple, stone by stone,
With Your word as firm foundation
For a faith matured and grown:
Christ the Savior, Christ the Servant,
Make in us Your Gospel known.**

**4 Come, O living Christ, renew us,
As of old in wind and flame;
With the Spirit's pow'r endue us,
Servants of Your saving name:
Christ the Savior, Christ the Servant,
Christ whose kingdom we proclaim.**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING Christ, Our Human Likeness Sharing Setting: Walter L. Pelz

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Gracious Lord, Your Spirit fills the world and gladdens Your Church with the power of the Gospel. Bless all preaching and witnessing with the fire and wind of the Spirit, that many may believe and be baptized. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Spirit, pour out Your rich gifts upon the people of God; enfire us with zeal and love for all that You call us to be, and keep us anchored in the hope of Christ, that we may be bountiful branches of Him Who is the True Vine. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As our congregation moves into a new phase of ministry, Gracious Father, shower down upon us such love for one another and for other communities of faith, that the steps we take will prove a blessing and give witness to Your grace. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, shower down Your blessings upon this good land and all who lead her. So also bless all the nations of the earth, and all their people. Keep those who serve our nation in dangerous places today in the shadow of Your wings, and bring peace where there is war, especially in the Holy Land. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We call on Your name, O Lord, praying in Your Spirit to help and relieve all for whom we pray: especially the families of Paul and Gladys and all who mourn, and for Ann, Arlo, Jerald, Chris, Sophia, Susan, Dolly, Melissa, Gloria, Norma, Trudy, Mary Ann, June, Peter, Wendy, Halle, Arthur, Eric and Ron.. Look with favor on us, Your daughters and sons, and grant us Your healing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We come, O Savior, to Your Table, for we are weak and weary. Nourish us by Your Body broken for us and Your precious blood shed. Forgive us for all our sins and renew us by this heavenly food. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, through Your Son You promised Your Holy Spirit, who would convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Enlighten our hearts so that we, confessing our all our sins, might receive forgiveness and everlasting life through faith in Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #503 O Day Full of Grace

**1 O day full of grace that now we see
Appearing on earth's horizon,
Bring light from our God that we may be
Replete in His joy this season.
God, shine for us now in this dark place;
Your name on our hearts emblazon.**

**2 O day full of grace, O blessèd time,
Our Lord on the earth arriving;
Then came to the world that light sublime,
Great joy for us all retrieving;
For Jesus all mortals did embrace,
All darkness and shame removing.**

**3 For Christ bore our sins, and not His own,
When He on the cross was hanging;
And then He arose and moved the stone
That we, unto Him belonging,
Might join with angelic hosts to raise
Our voices in endless singing.**

**4 God came to us then at Pentecost,
His Spirit new life revealing,
That we might no more from Him be lost,
All darkness for us dispelling.
His flame will the mark of sin efface
And bring to us all His healing.**

**5 When we on that final journey go
That Christ is for us preparing,
We'll gather in song, our hearts aglow,
All joy of the heavens sharing,
And walk in the light of God's own place,
With angels His name adoring.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE O Day Full of Grace Setting: Wilber Held

ALTAR FLOWERS: "In celebration of family birthday's and thankful for God's many blessings."

By Bev Wellington

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