

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:3b-13](#)

[John 20:19-23](#)

[Psalm 104:25-35, 37](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST, WHITSUNDAY, MAY 11, 2008 AT ALL HALLOWS' CHURCH, SOUTH RIVER PARISH, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning. Bonjour. Buongiorno. Guten Tag. Dobrye Dien. Salvete. Zao An. Ohaiyogozaimasu. On the morn that the Church was born---the Day of Pentecost---it must have been a true cacophony of tongues and tribes.

“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, 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 Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.”---Acts 2:7b-11

The amazing thing is that people can understand each other even though they don't speak the same national languages. Pentecost is the vision of the Church Triumphant, where God's inclusive and all-encompassing reign is the norm. Pentecost is the reversal of the Tower of Babel. However, in our world nowadays, many of us are only fluent in one language, let alone being able to understand another language without “learning” it. Sometimes, we even get confused when people speak English.

I came from a different culture. I also grew up in a different church culture. In Hong Kong, many churches are sometimes stereotyped as having a lot of nosy people, who pry into people's private lives and cross boundaries of proper Western social etiquettes. Oh, how I yearned for the day when I would become American! But of course we never gossip about people in America. Well, I learned that real fast! Human nature is the same whether we are in Montana or Mozambique. We like to talk. We like to communicate. But we really need help in building constructive and lifegiving dialogues. That's why Holy Spirit comes to guide us in our spiritual communication.

Over the course of Christian history, there have been numerous attempts to explain what the Holy Spirit is all about. The Old Testament tradition in Genesis describes the Holy Spirit as---the ruach---the wind or breath of God, which hovered over the deep at creation and gave life to Adam when blown into his nostrils. In John's Gospel, the Holy Spirit serves as a continuation of Jesus' presence to the disciples after his ascension to the right hand of the Father. In Luke's writings in Acts, the Holy Spirit truly gave birth to our mother Church. Augustine of Hippo describes the Holy Spirit as the “love” between the Father and the Son. In our own day and setting, I think that “divine communicator” is a proper way of contextualizing the Holy Spirit for our church. “Communication” comes from the Latin root, “communis,” which means “common.”

How then do we make use of this “divine communicator?” Or more properly speaking, how can we position ourselves in such a way so as to welcome the coming of the Holy Spirit in both our personal and corporate spiritual lives? Even though Jesus says to Nicodemus in John's Gospel, “The Spirit blows where it wills,” God is not whimsical by any means. God does have a plan. And God comes to us through the Holy Spirit to carry out that plan. And the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of wisdom and

guidance along our journey as we fulfill God's plan of salvation. The three pillars of our faith--- Scripture, Tradition and Reason---can help us benefit from the wisdom and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

First, our active and dynamic understanding of the Word of God is a function of the Holy Spirit. As Paul the Apostle teaches, no one can claim that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church, the same Holy Ghost engenders our faith in God. As long as we remain open to the God of surprises, the Holy Spirit will grace us many times in our journey of faith. Jesus says, "seek and ye shall find." The apostles waited expectantly for the coming of the Holy Spirit. From the Bible, we know that our willingness and open-mindedness to God are the prerequisites of the active working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Second, our orthodox and dynamic Tradition of faith nurtures us to receive the Holy Spirit. The sacraments of the church make the blessings and grace of God manifest in our liturgical celebration. In a sense, all things in the cosmos are already blessed by God. Church blessings and sacraments simply heighten our awareness of and increase our gratitude of God's bounty to us. Each time we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we become one with Christ, both spiritually and materially, because he dwells in us and we in him. And when we are baptized, we are reborn by water and the Spirit. We are regenerated ontologically as a new person, a new being. This spiritual regeneration is a free gift from God, regardless of our age, our consciousness, and even our volition. We are made citizens of God's kingdom through our common baptism. And we are then initiated on a lifelong journey to the bosom of God. Most of us need lots of help on the way. But the Holy Spirit will not leave us comfortless. In a few moments, Garrett and William will receive the Sacrament of Baptism in which they will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. We will welcome two fellow journeyers to Christ with us.

Third, the gift of Reason endowed by God helps humankind advance spiritually in every age. Combined with Scripture and Tradition, Reason can help us attain the fullness of faith, infused with the Holy Spirit. Most of us have experienced the frustration and anger when people refuse to reason with us. As faithful Christians, we can respectfully disagree on a variety of issues. The problem arises when we fail to listen to the "divine communicator" in our midst. Jesus has given us the best advice in our communication with each other: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We are still a small church. There is nothing we cannot talk about openly, respectfully, sensitively, and understandingly. Clear and respectful communication is not only a sign of the Holy Spirit, it is also sign of good breeding. Remember, as Episcopalians, we are a people of Common Prayer, but not necessarily common beliefs on every issue. And that is a strength of Anglicanism. And that is a charism or gift of the Episcopal Church. May we uphold this special gift that God has given us in our common life!

Sisters and brothers, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit begins in our hearts. When we are each spiritually healthy, our entire parish will reap the benefits of our spiritual discipline. Let us model after the Church on the Day of Pentecost: no matter what language we speak, theological, social or political, we will indeed strive to understand and appreciate each other. Communicate as the inclusive Body of Christ with each other. Talk to your rector. For that, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Merci! Grazie! Danke! Spaciba! Xie xie!

And thanks be to God!

Amen.

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All Hallows Parish
Davidsonville, MD