

# HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of May 19, 2024

*Collect for the Day of Pentecost*

**O** God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.** BCP 227

## **Acts 2:1-21** NRSVue, 2021

*This lesson tells the story of the Holy Spirit filling the apostles and empowering them to share the message of the gospel with people of different languages. Clearly this was a most dramatic moment in the life of the early church, an experience described in terms of wind and fire. From this time forward the mighty works of God done in Jesus will be told to all the peoples of the earth, crossing barriers of language and culture.*

- 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
- 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
- 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.
- 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
- 5 Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem.
- 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.
- 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
- 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?
- 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
- 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
- 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”
- 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”
- 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”
- 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.
- 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.
- 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:
- 17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

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- 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
- 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
- 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
- 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

### Exploring Acts 2:1-21

**Acts.** This book is the sequel to the gospel according to Luke. Beginning with Jesus' ascension, Luke tells the story of the beginnings of the church. By no means a comprehensive history, it does however describe the spread of the church from Jerusalem to all of Palestine, and as far as Greece. The episodes he reports show how Christianity arose out of Judaism. He shows us something of the struggles the church underwent in accepting Gentiles as members. The Holy Spirit guides and strengthens the church as it spreads through much of the Roman Empire.

### **Theological Perspective**

*By Donald K. McKim*

The Day of Pentecost is sometimes called “the birthday of the church.” The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, after the ascension of Jesus ([Acts 1:6–11](#)), to empower the disciples and “devout Jews from every nation” who were assembled in Jerusalem. They “began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability” ([Acts 2:4](#)). This is seen as the fulfillment of Jesus’ command and promise that disciples would “receive power” when the Holy Spirit came upon them ([Acts 1:8](#)). They spoke in other languages and heard in their own “native language” ([Acts 2:6](#)). Using the words of [Joel 2:28–32](#), Peter proclaimed that in the “last days” God will pour out the Spirit of God “upon all flesh” so that sons and daughters, young and old, and “even” slaves, “both men and women” shall see visions and prophesy; and “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” ([Acts 2:17–21](#)).

Theologically, the Christian church begins to take shape when the Holy Spirit fills those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah, enabling them to proclaim the gospel and to witness to the Christ “to the ends of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#)). The church emerges by the Holy Spirit, who dramatically establishes a fellowship of faith, calling believers into the household of God to be witnesses to what God has done in Jesus Christ for the purposes of salvation. Pentecost is the “big bang” event that sets the events of the book of Acts into motion.

***The Spirit for the World.*** The language of the Pentecost experience, with its images of “wind,” “spirit,” and being “filled” with the Spirit or the “breath” of life, is reminiscent of God’s initial creative activity ([Gen. 1:2; 2:7](#)). Here, however, the emphasis is not so much on creation or God’s works in history as on direct contact with the Spirit of God, who is now filling the world in a new way. The roll call of nations and languages points to the universality of the Spirit’s work for the whole world. God’s Spirit is the divine energy that now enables an eternal life to be real for those on whom God’s Spirit is poured and in whom the Spirit dwells (*cf.* [Rom. 5:5](#)).

Even more, linking the Pentecost events with the prophetic word about “last days” ([Acts 2:17](#)) points forward to the ultimate consummation of God’s reign in a “new heaven and new earth” ([Rev. 21:1](#)). The coming messianic age has already begun with Jesus as the Christ

(Messiah; [Acts 2:31–36](#)). Now the Spirit is the presence of the risen Christ throughout the world. The Spirit works in and for the world as history moves toward the future fullness of God’s reign (kingdom). So wherever we see signs of the coming age—in works of love, peace, and justice—we know God’s Spirit is at work. The creation itself is “groaning” toward its future redemption, even as those who have received the “first fruits of the Spirit” ([Rom. 8:23](#)) live into hope.

***The Spirit for the Church.*** Pentecost is a foundational theological event for the church because the Spirit is sent by God to incorporate people, universally, into the body of those who acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. It is God who initiates Pentecost, as God initiates salvation. God’s Spirit calls a people to faith and comforts, challenges, and guides the church. The reality of the Spirit’s presence is the church’s guide to living as faithful servants of God in the world and faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ.

There is a rabbinic tradition that says that when the law was given at Sinai, the Ten Commandments were given with a single sound, yet when the voice went forth it was divided into seven voices and then seventy tongues, so that “every people received the law in their own language.”<sup>[1]</sup> In later Judaism, the day of Pentecost, as the fiftieth day after the presentation of the first sheaf of the barley harvest, was also considered the anniversary of the giving of the law at Sinai. The law was meant to express God’s will and guide the people of Israel. So now, with the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, the church receives God’s Spirit to guide and help and indwell the people of God as they seek to live out God’s will, known in Jesus Christ.

***The Spirit for All People.*** Luke associates the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost with the prophet Joel who announces the coming Day of the Lord when God’s righteousness and mercy will be revealed and enacted. The messianic reign is marked by the reception of the Spirit by “all flesh.” The Spirit is for all people who are united by the Spirit in the praise of God in prophecy, visions, and dreams. Humans are now united in their diversities of age, gender, and social status by the great outpouring of the Spirit.

Sometimes Pentecost is seen as the reversal of the effects of the tower of Babel ([Gen. 11:1–9](#)), when the languages of the world were “confused” and people were scattered. Peter’s association of the Pentecost event with the outpouring of the Spirit foretold by Joel means that there is now a new community of women and men where the one Spirit bestows many gifts—on all people, regardless of who they are. As Jürgen Moltmann put it, “In the kingdom of the Spirit, everyone will experience his and her own endowment and all will experience the new fellowship together.”<sup>[2]</sup> The church is the place where this new fellowship begins to take shape as it recognizes the gifts of the Spirit in and for all people. To realize that “all flesh,” all people, receive the Spirit, enables us to watch and participate in God’s work in this world with a wide-open vision. We live in eager anticipation of the Spirit’s work in our midst as we join with all others to accomplish the Spirit’s purposes.

[1] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts, New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 60.

[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239.

## Psalm 104:24-34, 35b NRSVue, 2021

*The psalm describes the wonders of the world created and renewed by the Lord's Spirit.*

- 24 O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
- 25 There is the sea, great and wide; creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.
- 26 There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
- 27 These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
- 28 when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
- 29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
- 30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.
- 31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—
- 32 who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke.
- 33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
- 34 May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD.
- 35b Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD!

### Exploring Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

**Psalms** is a collection of collections. The psalms were written over many centuries, stretching from the days of Solomon's temple (about 950 BC) to after the Exile (about 350 BC.) Psalms are of five types: hymns of praise, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. Within the book, there are five "books"; there is a doxology ("Blessed be ... Amen and Amen") at the end of each book.

#### Commentary on Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

*By Elizabeth Webb*

In [Psalm 104](#), the world that God creates and recreates is not just ordered, but rhythmic, each created thing a note that contributes to the Spirit's song.

The whole of creation is like a song of joy sung by the Spirit of the Lord.

Looking at the whole of Psalm 104 helps us to see more deeply the significance of the portion of the text appointed for today. The psalm begins with a hymn of praise for the glory of the Creator, "clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light" ([verses 1b-2a](#)). That glory is manifest in the manifold works of creation, in the rhythmic ordering of the world and all its parts.

The ensuing song of creation closely, although not slavishly, follows the cadence of the creation narrative in [Genesis 1](#). God is praised for stretching out the heavens "like a tent" ([verse 2b](#)), for establishing the foundation of the earth ([verse 5](#)), and covering it with the deep ([verse 6](#)), and for rebuking the waters to flee to their appointed places, "so that they might not again cover the earth" ([verse 9](#)). The moon is made to mark the seasons, and night

and day establish a natural rhythm for nocturnal creatures and for human beings ([verses 19-23](#)). [Verse 24](#) reads, or sings, like an elaboration on God’s assertion of the goodness of created things; the multiplicity of creatures, and the wisdom with which they are made, further elucidate the meaning of “good.” Psalm 104 is like the poetry of Genesis 1 set to music, singing the wondrous order that God has brought forth.

The musicality of the psalm is further enhanced by its emphasis on the interdependence of God’s creatures. Springs that “gush forth in the valleys” provide water for wild animals ([verse 10](#)). Vegetation is made to grow in order to supply food for cattle and human beings ([verse 14](#)). God not only made trees, but made various trees as homes for different birds ([verses 16-17](#)).

Mountains are created to provide homes for goats, and rocks to provide homes for “coney” (mostly likely the hyrax, a small hoofed mammal indigenous to parts of the Middle East and Africa; [verse 18](#)). Everything that God has made exists for another creature’s survival, and even enjoyment; birds “sing among the branches” of trees that grow alongside streams of water ([verse 12](#)). Interdependence is the order that God has given to the world, so that each created thing sounds a note in an ongoing harmony.

That creatures are made not only to survive but also to enjoy life underscores what is perhaps the central motif of the entire psalm, and particularly of the passage for today: joy. God delights in the creation, and we, the created, delight in this world and in the God who made it. The world is made from joy and for joy.

The “gushing forth” of springs and the joy of birdsong in the trees alongside ([verses 10-12](#)); the abundantly-watered “trees of the Lord” ([verse 16](#)); “wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart” ([verse 15](#)) — these point to a world made not just for the satisfaction of need but also for the happiness of its inhabitants. In these works God rejoices ([verse 31](#)), and all creatures return that joy not only by rejoicing in God ([verse 34](#)), but also by delighting in the things that God has made.

It is by understanding joy as a central theme in this text that we can understand the role of Leviathan in the passage for today. [Verse 24](#) operates as a summation of what has come before: God is praised for the multiple wonders of the earth, and for the wisdom with which they were made. The psalmist then turns to the sea and its inhabitants, as the crowning example of the wonder of creation. “Innumerable creatures” inhabit the sea, “living things both small and great” ([verse 25](#)). The greatest of these is the Leviathan.

In other texts, like [Psalm 74:14](#), Leviathan is among the monsters of chaos and evil that God vanquishes at the beginning of creation. God’s response to Job consists in large part of a challenge to Job to overpower Leviathan as God has done ([Job 41](#)). Thus references to Leviathan tend to operate as vehicles for proclaiming divine might over the forces of chaos. In Psalm 104, however, Leviathan is simply another creature that delights in the world that God has made; Leviathan’s purpose in the created order is “to sport” in the sea ([verse 26](#)). The joy with which God creates is reflected in the playfulness of the sea’s most dreaded beast. Thus joy triumphs over chaos in a way that raw power cannot: by winning it over.

When God provides, creatures thrive, “they are filled with good things” ([verse 28](#)). If

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God's face were to turn away from the creation, God's creatures would be dismayed ([verse 29a](#)); God's presence and attentiveness are necessary for the fullness of life of all God's creatures. The removal of divine breath, of spirit, results in death, but the sending forth of the spirit of God brings life, and renews that which has been reduced to dust ([verses 29b-30](#)). The God whose look causes the earth to tremble, whose touch causes mountains to smoke ([verse 32](#)), and for whom sin and evil are offending breaches in the harmony of creation ([verse 35a](#)) — this God is most powerfully made manifest not in acts of might but in moments of joy.

There is joy at the foundation of the earth, in the dew on the grass, in the romping of a dog, in the quiet of cricket song on a summer night. There is joy in the wondrous interdependence of God's creatures, in the necessity in which we exist for one another. There is joy in the winning over of the chaos that continues to threaten God's harmonious creation. There is joy in the gifts of life and spirit that we receive from God, and in our rejoicing in those gifts. For this joy, we offer God our joyous praise.

["Commentary on Psalm 104:24-34, 35b"](#) posted June 8, 2014 to [Working Preacher](#)

## Romans 8:22-27 NRSVue, 2021

*In this New Testament reading the apostle Paul understands the whole of creation to be linked with human destiny as we await our redemption. We await our adoption in hope, dependent on the indwelling Spirit of God who intercedes for us in all things in ways we cannot achieve for ourselves.*

- 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor,  
23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.  
24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees?  
25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.  
26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.  
27 And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

### Exploring Romans 8:22-27

**Romans.** Romans is the first epistle in the New Testament, although not the first to be written. Paul wrote it to the church at Rome, which included both Jews and Gentiles. His primary theme is the basics of the good news of Christ, salvation for all people. The book was probably written in 57 AD, when Paul was near the end of his third missionary journey around the Eastern Mediterranean. It is unusual in that it was written to a church that Paul had not visited.

### Pastoral perspective

*By J. Barney Hawkins, IV*

The characters in Raymond Carver's "A Small Good Thing"[1] live "with sighs too deep for words" ([v. 26](#)). This short story by one of America's greatest writers is about Scotty, who is hit by a car while walking to school the week of his eighth birthday. His mother, Ann Weiss, has already gone to the local bakery and ordered a special cake for the birthday boy.

Everything had seemed right in the world of Ann and Howard Weiss.

Everything changes in the Weiss family's world as Scotty is taken to the hospital and slips deeper and deeper into a coma. Raymond Carver takes the reader into the pain and bondage of the Weisses' agony, an agony that Paul knew as he wrote to the church in Rome. In [Romans 8:22–27](#), the apostle foretells a future glory but is mindful of the “groaning” and “sighs” that belong to the “children of God” in the present age. Paul asserts that “the sufferings of this present time” are “not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” ([8:18](#)). Clearly, Paul knows that pastorally he cannot focus solely on the future glory. It is the present suffering that is on his mind as he writes to the Christians in Rome—particularly in this brief passage.

Paul confirms that his readers “have the first fruits of the Spirit”; yet they and we “groan” because we in every age await the “redemption of our bodies.” Once again, Paul navigates the choppy waters of now and not yet, of the present time and the time when all that plagues the “children of God” will be conquered “through him who loved us.”

The apostle acknowledges that “in hope we were saved” ([v. 24](#)). We hope for that which is not seen, and “we wait for it with patience” ([v. 25](#)). Most pastors know firsthand that the followers of Jesus do not often wait “with patience.” In Raymond Carver's poignant story, there is no patience. The baker is anxious for Scotty's birthday cake to be picked up and paid for; the Weisses are full of anxiety as they hope for what they do not see in their coma-bound young son; and the medical staff impatiently searches for answers. All of Carver's characters are hopeful, but none is patient. So it is with most of our members.

Pastors, like the apostle Paul, know that it is no comfort to the faithful to deny present suffering by focusing on the hoped-for future glory. In an ironic way, reflections on the future must be postponed, even as it is the hoped-for future that pulls the Christian through this present time with all its “groaning,” pain, “weakness,” and “sighs too deep for words.” In most pastoral care and conversations, it is not the future but the present that demands our most careful listening as pastors. Pastors do not pass over the present; rather, they pass through it as they face with their flocks the “hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword” that are named in the compelling crescendo of [Romans 8](#).

As pastors listen and walk with their flocks through the darkest valleys, they boldly claim in faith, hope, and love that the “Spirit helps us in our weakness” ([v. 26](#)). This strong assurance comes to the faithful even when “we do not know how to pray as we ought” ([v. 26](#)). When we cannot find words, the Spirit, according to Paul, is one with us in our “sighs.” The presence of the Spirit in the time of the present suffering is an ever-present reminder that God is present with the faithful always. Paul anticipates fully the work of the Trinity: God searches the heart, loves us in Jesus Christ, and knows the mind of the Spirit. Finally, in our weakness God is present with us in the one “who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” ([v. 34](#)).

The pastor is likewise one who intercedes—one who both stands with the faithful in their groans and weakness and proclaims the good news of God's future in Jesus Christ, even in the present age. Raymond Carver's short story ends with Scotty's death and a vision of

the redemption and wholeness that will characterize God’s future. Scotty’s grieving, anger-filled parents find redemption and wholeness, at least for a moment, at the bakery in a late afternoon visit with the baker who had been phoning over and over again, requesting that they pick up and pay for Scotty’s birthday cake. The baker apologizes for the incessant calls and breaks open a rich dark loaf of bread. Ann and Howard partake of the rich dark bread, and the baker tells them that eating is a “small good thing” in a time of groaning, in a time of “sighs too deep for words.” The baker listened to Scotty’s parents, and they to him.

As pastors, we are called to sacramental acting and listening when faithful people struggle with living now, as they await a hoped-for future. Hoping for what is not seen, faithful pastors in the present act and listen patiently with courage and proclaim boldly with assurance the good news of Jesus Christ, the one who lived in times like these and who now lives eternally with the God of our future hope.

Denise Levertov in her poem “A Cure of Souls” has written both poignantly and powerfully of the role of the true pastor.[2]

In the poem the pastor’s job is to lead the sheep through their mundane lives, though the pastor has also caught an echo of a reality beyond the present—a promise toward which even the most ordinary pastoring always leads. The “bell tolling” is the hoped-for glory. But now, in this time of groaning and sighs, the pastor remembers that the flock is “hungry” and needs “the grass, today and everyday.”

[1] “A Small Good Thing,” in *Listening for God*, ed. Paula J. Carlson and Peter S. Hawkins (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1994), 74–93.

[2] “A Cure of Souls,” in *Denise Levertov, O Taste and See* (New York: New Directions Books, 1962).

## John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 NRSVue, 2021

*In our gospel Jesus tells his disciples that his going away will mean the coming of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will guide them into all truth. The Counselor-Spirit will bring true judgment into the world. Everything the Spirit declares will have been received from Jesus, even as all which the Father has belongs to Jesus. The Spirit, then, reveals Jesus who himself has made the Father known.*

- 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.
- 27 You also are to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.
- 4 “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.
- 5 But now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’
- 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.
- 7 Nevertheless, 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.
- 8 And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:
- 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me;
- 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you will see me no longer;



- 11 about 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.
- 13 When 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.
- 14 He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
- 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

### Exploring John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

**John** is the fourth gospel. Its author makes no attempt to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus (which the other gospels do, to a degree), but rather “...these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” John includes what he calls signs, stories of miracles, to help in this process.

#### Pastoral Perspective

*by Thomas Troeger*

***The Promised Helper Comes.*** One of the losses we humans feel most keenly is that of human companionship. When a person we have been close to leaves “for good,” we experience grief and sorrow. In John’s Gospel the essence of love is to be connected to and share deeply in the presence and work of Jesus. In Jesus’ farewell discourse we see him dealing with the disciples’ love and sorrow at his impending departure. Jesus, anticipating the grief they will inevitably feel, prepares the disciples for his return to the Father. Although it is time for him to leave them physically, he will continue to be with them spiritually through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The language used to describe this person is full of significance—Paraclete, Advocate, Helper, Comforter—One who by coming alongside gives strength, encouragement, and ability. Our text divides into three sections, each emphasizing a particular aspect of the work of the promised helper.

***Truth-Telling Witness (15:26–27).*** The One who will replace Jesus’ physical presence in the world will be the “Spirit of truth” who will speak truthfully and bear testimony on his behalf. Because the Spirit, sent by Jesus, will come from the Father, he will continue the work of both Father and Son. What he says will be precisely what Father and Son have said. He will strengthen the community of believers and enable them to speak the truth about what they have experienced of Jesus the Son. The testimony of the Spirit within the disciples and in the community of the church will empower them to testify in word and deed to what they have witnessed in the life of Jesus from the very beginning.

***From Grief to Prophetic Proclamation (16:4b–11).*** Jesus does not fail to acknowledge the sorrow and pain of his disciples. However, Jesus argues that his leaving has its advantages. Far from being all bad, his departure will give room for a greater engagement with the whole world. Although the community of faith may initially grieve the loss of his physical presence, they will be imbued with power from on high and will become a courageous community unafraid to confront the world with the truth of the Word of God. There are three areas of confrontation between the community of faith and the world. Each is theological, having to do with the truth of the Word of God: sin, righteousness, and judgment.

*Sin* is not so much a moral failure as a theological one. As in the garden Adam and Eve chose not to believe the word of God, so in the world sin lies in our human failure to believe the word of God. *Righteousness* also is not so much a moral as a theological category. The truth of the Word of God is seen in the vindication of Jesus. Unbelieving eyes see his death as a defeat. However, the eyes of faith see his resurrection as a vindication, a victory over the world, made known by his promised triumphal return to and embrace by the Father, who sent him into the world in the first place. *Judgment* has to do with who has the ultimate and final say—the power of evil in the world or God. In Jesus’ life, death, and especially his resurrection, the eyes of faith can see the overthrow of the power of evil. The ultimate truth is made plain, even before the end of time. The Spirit of truth will not only help the believing community see and understand these ultimate truths, but also impart the courage to bear witness to them before an unbelieving world. The Promised Helper will inspire spiritual insight and moral courage. Throughout history, when people of faith have seen truth that others cannot see, they have often found the grace to courageously live and bear witness to it. Such courage is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

***The Helper as the Teacher Who Has More to Give from the Same Source (16:12–15).*** The Blessed Paraclete is the link that keeps alive the relationship between the past and the future. The Holy Spirit connects the creative genius of the Father with the redemptive love of the Son and the courageous witness of the church. There is a bond that keeps history, current experience, and future hope together in Christian faith. Anglican Bishop John V. Taylor described the Holy Spirit as the “Go-between God”: the God who connects past and future in a present that is full of meaning. For Taylor, what is spiritual about us is our capacity for relationship that lies at the heart of our being.

There were things Jesus wished to share with the disciples that they were not yet ready to receive. These things are not out of character with what he did share. However, part of the work of the Spirit has been to continue the work of Christ through the life of the church. The Spirit still speaks through the church and people of faith. This living word of God glorifies Christ in that it is an elaboration and application of the life and word of Jesus, not a contradiction or denial of it. The Spirit will help make plain and visible the presence of God in the church and the world. The life-giving presence of God manifest in creation, reestablished in the life and death of Christ, will be seen and heard anew in the church through the power of the Spirit. The community of Christ’s faithful people will be connected to God and one another by the Spirit’s work of guiding, leading, revealing, and reminding. Through the power and presence of the Spirit, the church is enabled to be a faithful witness to the presence of God. Through the enabling presence of the Spirit, every need for care and support we have in all of life’s difficult and painful circumstances can be met. The church can draw upon the empowering presence of the Spirit to be a community that cares for and supports all persons in their times of need.

## Bibliographical and Contributor Information

Unless otherwise noted, the Introductions to the readings come from *Introducing the Lessons of the Church Year, Third Edition* by Frederick Borsch, and George Woodward. (New York; Harrisburg, PA; Denver: Morehouse Publishing, 2009).

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Unless otherwise noted, the commentaries are from: David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B. Vol. 3*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

### Contributors

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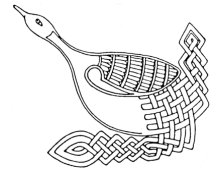
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## ❧ Odds & Ends ❧

### Pentecost

The term means “the fiftieth day.” It is used in both the OT and the NT. In the OT it refers to a feast of seven weeks known as the Feast of Weeks. It was apparently an agricultural event that focused on the harvesting of first fruits. Josephus referred to Pentecost as the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover. The term is used in the NT to refer to the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:1](#)), shortly after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Christians came to understand the meaning of Pentecost in terms of the gift of the Spirit. The Pentecost event was the fulfillment of a promise which Jesus gave concerning the return of the Holy Spirit. The speaking in tongues, which was a major effect of having received the Spirit, is interpreted by some to symbolize the church's worldwide preaching. In the Christian tradition, Pentecost is now the seventh Sunday after Easter. It emphasizes that the church is understood as the body of Christ which is drawn together and given life by the Holy Spirit. Some understand Pentecost to be the origin and sending out of the church into the world. The Day of Pentecost is one of the seven principal feasts of the church year in the Episcopal Church (BCP, p. 15). The Day of Pentecost is identified by the BCP as one of the feasts that is “especially appropriate” for baptism (p. 312). The liturgical color for the feast is red. Pentecost has also been known as Whitsun or Whitsunday, a corruption of “White Sunday.” This term reflects the custom by which those who were baptized at the Vigil of Pentecost would wear their white baptismal garments to church on the Day of Pentecost. The BCP provides directions for observance of a Vigil of Pentecost, which begins with the Service of Light (p. 227). The Hymnal 1982 provides a variety of hymns for Pentecost (Hymns 223-230) and the Holy Spirit (Hymns 500-516).



The Holy Spirit was often depicted as a wild goose in Celtic art.

"Pentecost" in [An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church](#)

## Ezekiel 37:1-14 NRSVue *(This is an alternate first text for the Day of Pentecost.)*

*In this reading the prophet has a vision of the bones of a dead and hopeless people being restored to new life in their homeland. The Lord calls upon Ezekiel as son of man to prophesy that the people who have experienced exile and many hardships will live again. The Spirit of the Lord restores their spirit and breath, and they rise from death. Although this passage can be understood to anticipate the hope of individual resurrection, Israel did not yet have this belief.*

- 1 The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.
- 2 He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.
- 3 He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.”
- 4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.
- 5 Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.
- 6 I will lay sinews on 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.”
- 7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.
- 8 I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them.
- 9 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”
- 10 I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.
- 11 Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’
- 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.
- 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people.
- 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”