

Southport Presbyterian Church
Rev. June Barrow
May 31, 2009, Pentecost

Come, Holy Spirit
Acts 2:1-12

Al and I have house guests right now – two college basketball players – one from New York, one from Missouri. The shorter one is six and half feet tall. They are here in Indy training for a trip to China where they will play exhibition games and share Jesus.

A few weeks ago we received paperwork, telling us we needed to provide these athletes breakfast and lunch each day and that they didn't need anything special – they would eat whatever we eat. But since we mostly have Lean Cuisine and skim milk, I didn't believe that. That first day, I packed their lunches: a ham sandwich, a turkey sandwich, cheese and crackers, a protein shake, a protein bar, a nutri-grain bar, cookies, a banana, an apple, carrots, peanuts, water and Gatorade. That night, I asked them about lunch and they said it was just the right amount of food. We love having them. Before they arrived, as we waited for them, they were just an idea to us. But now, we know them! They are James and Andrew, both 21, and they laugh a lot, talk a lot and eat a lot.

Our scripture today opens with a group of people who know Jesus is alive because they have actually seen him and talked with him since his resurrection. And now he's gone and they've been told to wait, to expect, and there is rising expectation as they wait for something brand new – for the Holy Spirit to come – even though they don't know what it will mean.

But let's back up. **Who is the Holy Spirit?** We know that God is three persons in one – God the Father, God the Son Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is the least talked of, the least understood of the three. Perhaps it's because we associate the Spirit with some fears of being too emotional. I heard of what happened when a woman went to visit a church that was very formal. She listened attentively and hearing something she believed, she said, "Amen." Heads turned, but she didn't notice. Later on, she loved something in the sermon and shouted, "Hallelujah." Again heads turned, and an usher moved towards her and whispered, "Ma'am, please be quiet. We don't speak out in this church." She said, "But I've got religion." And he said, "Well, you didn't get it here."

There is nothing to fear in God the Holy Spirit but only someone to welcome! Let's review. In the first verses of the Bible, Genesis chapter one, it says that the Spirit of God hovered over the deep, hovered over all the disorder and chaos and formlessness and then order came in Creation. Throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon specific persons at specific times for specific purposes. For instance in **Exodus 31**, the Lord said to Moses, **"See I have chosen Bezalel... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs..."**

Another instance is Gideon. The nation had been overrun by an enemy and the situation was desperate. God spoke to Gideon and told him that he was to lead his people to freedom. Gideon

replied that the Lord has chosen the wrong person – that he was not able to do such a job. But the calling persisted; Gideon is chosen to fight to free his people. In **Judges 6** we read, **“Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.”** That is how Gideon became a great leader. The Holy Spirit filled him with power and ability. So you see, in the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon particular people at particular times for particular tasks.

And as we go on through the Old Testament there is a rising sense of promise – of something more to come. The prophets predict the coming of the Messiah and also the coming of the Spirit. The people wait for the new things God has promised. The prophet Ezekiel records God’s promise: **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”** (Ezekiel 36:26) The prophet Joel writes: **“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”** (Joel 2:28-29) There is a growing sense of anticipation and promise as the people wait for the promise of God to come, for God to do a new thing.

The promise of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are linked. Finally, the new thing comes. Jesus the Messiah is born. In **Luke 3:16** we find John the Baptist preaching and he says: **“I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”** So the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the promised coming of the Holy Spirit are linked. A few verses later, **“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”** It’s the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise. The Messiah has arrived and in new ways the Holy Spirit is breaking in.

In John’s gospel we read this: **“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”** (John 7:37-38)

As Jesus is with the disciples, the sense of promise builds. In **John 14**, Jesus says: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you... But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”** And in **John 15**, Jesus says, **“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”** And in **John 16**, **“He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment... Jesus added: ‘I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.’”**

In Acts, we see the promise fulfilled. Acts 1 says, **“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, [Jesus] gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Jesus added: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

Just a few verses later we read: **“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...”**

There was tremendous power and energy in the room and those disciples were transformed. Peter, who only a few weeks earlier had failed his test of courage when he insisted that he didn't even know who Jesus was, this same Peter goes out into the street and begins to preach. He tells them that Jesus was the promised Messiah for whom they had been waiting, that though wicked men may have put him to death, the death of Jesus was all planned long ago by God, part of God's amazing plan for our salvation. And the story says: **“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’” (Acts 2:37-39)**

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, the Counselor, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Helper. So what does the Holy Spirit do? He comes with truth and with power. He heals, leads, guides, instructs, assures, reminds, and gives power.

The Holy Spirit transforms us. The Holy Spirit brings power for change. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 3** that we **“are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** This week I was talking with a woman. I'd heard her describe her husband as a person full of love and patience and kindness and mercy. She said that her husband told her that he was moved by her words, because of what an angry man he used to be. She said, “I'd really forgotten that. He did used to be angry so much, but it seems so long ago. He's so different now.” They would both say that he has been changed by the Spirit of God.

Everyone who heard the disciples on the day of Pentecost understood what they were saying. Everyone heard the good news about Jesus in their own language. That was a miracle of power. Peter preached about the resurrection of Jesus. The Bible says that those who heard him speak were cut to the heart and 3,000 were saved that day. Peter, a blue collar fisherman from a small town who had never had a course on public speaking, preached a life changing sermon and the Church was born. He simply told his hearers that these events of Pentecost were no accident. God planned it all. He reminds them that the prophet **Joel** said, **“And in the last days it shall 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.” (Acts 2:17) Peter was transformed by the coming of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that God loves us. In **Romans 8**, Paul teaches that the Spirit keeps reminding us that we are in relationship with God. He writes: **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”** We can so easily forget that we are loved and held by God; we can so easily remember all of our own weaknesses. And so the Spirit reminds us that we are God’s beloved children and we have no reason to fear. In **Romans 5:5** Paul says: **“The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”** This is the Holy Spirit as the Comforter.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He convicts about what is right and wrong, about what is true and false. And often this calls us to pray, to repent, to admit that God is right despite our many arguments, to apologize to others and make relationships right as we are able. That happened to me this week as I prayed and thought about this message. I was hoping for comfort and what I got was a deep conviction about an apology I had to make.

The Holy Spirit also gives us gifts. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 12**: **“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in everyone. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”** The gifts are given “for the common good” – that is, for the Church to be the Church. Some of you are gifted with administration or teaching or mercy or giving or leading or encouraging and those gifts bless and build the Church. And we must use our gifts that the Spirit pours out among us. They bless others but they will bless you too, more than you can imagine. I speak from experience! Every Christian is to have a ministry. Nobody is to sit on the sidelines. Perhaps you have heard the description of the church which said it was like a football game where 22 people desperately in need of a rest are watched by 22,000 people desperately in need of exercise. God gives us gifts and abilities, interests and passions and we are responsible to use them to bring God to other people. Don’t miss out on the blessing of being used by God by using your gifts. My husband and I still talk about the year we taught Sunday school together to 2 and 3 year olds. Each week we left church with hilarious stories.

The Holy Spirit guides us. That’s why we pray and think and talk together. We know that God has plans for this congregation and we are listening for what they are. It’s the reason that many of our elders gather to pray in the dining room each Tuesday morning at 6 a.m. and many are fasting through the day, praying for the Holy Spirit to guide us all into the future. Our job is to pray, to seek, to listen, to follow, to obey as the Holy Spirit guides us.

The Holy Spirit still comes in fresh new ways. In **Ephesians 5:18**, Paul writes, **“Be filled with the Spirit.”** The command is written in a Greek tense that describes an ongoing action. It’s called the “continuous present.” In other words, it means “Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.” We may pray to be filled again and again with the Holy Spirit. What is it like when the Spirit of God comes in a new way? Well, I think it’s different for each of us. Maybe it’s like falling in love. For a very calm, reserved person, their deep feelings may not show much. I know a couple who worked together in the same department at Lilly. He was an engineer and she was

an administrative assistant. Everyone in their department was shocked when they returned from vacation to announce they had gotten married and been on a honeymoon. No one even knew they liked each other. Two quiet people in love! But others – well, you can all think of someone who, when he fell in love, everyone could tell. Everyone knew because he was a more expressive person.

We need explanation and experience. God is still pouring out his spirit on people. Friends, we preach the truth about Jesus, about his death and resurrection. We need the explanation of the gospel. But we also need the experience of God's love and that's what the Spirit does for us. We need to repent and believe in Jesus and we also need the coming of the Holy Spirit. Someone said it like this: The explanation is like a nutritious steak kept in a deep freezer. If you give a frozen steak to a hungry person, it's not much good. But if you put that frozen steak on a grill, soon the juices begin to run, the steak sizzles, and aroma fills the air and that steak can feed someone. The Holy Spirit is like the fire that takes the explanation of the Gospel of Jesus and gives someone the experience of the love and mercy of God.

We need explanation and experience; we need to know and we need to receive. We need knowledge about God and we also need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We need to know who Jesus is, why he came, what he taught, how he died, and how he was raised again. We need the facts and we also need the experience of knowing our own need for the Savior, our own hunger for home. The Bible says, "Be filled with the Spirit." Maybe it's like a balloon. If you blow up a balloon this big, it's full of air. If you blow it up this big, it's still completely full of air. There is room for more in all of us.

Come, Holy Spirit. Perhaps for you, Christian faith is mostly an explanation, a set of doctrines, a body of truth – something to believe in intellectually. But perhaps for you Jesus seems at arm's length. Perhaps some of you need a refreshing, a renewal of love and faith and hope. Perhaps you need the love of God poured out in your heart. Maybe you are tired or your faith is lagging. Perhaps you need the transforming power of the Spirit. Are some of you bound by addictions or immorality or impurity or envy or anger and you'd like to be set free and you know you need divine power? We will pray individually and also as a community that we will receive a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. Remember what Paul says: Keep on being filled with the Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us.

Materials from The Alpha Course, which we at SPC have used many times, were helpful in preparing this message.