

Sermon – “Companion, Advocate and Counselor”  
Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 2022  
Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-6, 12-18, John 15:25-29  
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Our first scripture reading is from Acts, chapter 2. This is Luke’s account of what took place at the Pentecost festival fifty days following the Passover, which marked the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those gathered hear the words of the disciples in their own dialect and experience God’s presence in a life changing way. Listen for the word of God.

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.*

#### **PAUSE FOR READERS.**

*Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” <sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘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. <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. Amen.*

Our second reading is John 15:25-29. This is the first of four teachings in John’s gospel about God’s spirit. Jesus names the spirit as “Advocate,” from the Greek word *parakletos*. Jesus reassures disciples of all times and places with the promise of the “Paraclete” – a companion, advocate, and counselor. In the absence of Jesus’ physical presence followers of Christ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in which *they live and move and have their being*. This spirit empowers those with whom the spirit dwells to speak the truth and to live Christ’s love. Hear now the word of God.

*25* "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. *26* 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. *27* 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. *28* You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. *29* And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. Amen.

The title of the sermon: “Companion, Advocate and Counselor”

*Text: But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit... will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. John 14:26*

Let us pray. Holy Advocate and Loving Companion, make us ever more aware of your empowering presence in our lives. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

On this Pentecost Sunday, as we honor our high school graduates and recognize all the graduates within our faith community, we give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the person of the Trinity who is our Companion, Advocate and Counselor. We remember the extraordinary experience of those who gathered in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival, fifty days following Easter morning; and how God’s spirit lived and moved among them, in a new way, like a mighty wind, empowering them with words that were not their own and experiencing a solidarity and an understanding that transcended language and culture. They knew as they watched the tongues of fire, even as Moses knew when he stood before the burning bush, that they were on Holy Ground, that God was in their midst in a powerful and life changing way.

The paraclete whom Jesus promised to the disciples before his ascension arrives on that first Pentecost in a refreshing wind which opens hearts and minds and provides resilience and a reservoir of strength for the unexpected turns and challenges along the way of our life journeys.

Each one of us, no doubt, needs a companion, advocate and counselor on our journeys ...someone who encourages us when we are feeling unsure of ourselves and reminds us of who we are; someone who speaks up for us when we can’t find our own words and empowers us to do what we know is right even when we don’t feel like it... someone who is strong enough to be with us when we are angry and hurt and sad. Through our growing up years, that someone may be a parent, a mentor, a teacher, a friend, a sibling, a pastor. Christ’s prayer for his disciples and each of us as we grow and mature is that the voices of our advocates along the way become our own, that we find our own voices, and that we stay attuned to the wise voice of God’s spirit within.

Two weeks ago, we celebrated 50 years of nurturing young children in our preschool. A quote selected by Silvey Barge, the widow of the Rev. Dr. James Barge was shared to mark the occasion. As we celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism and covenant as a congregation to be a companion, advocate, and counselor to Teddy on his journey, the quote is apropos today. Henri Nouwen, Roman Catholic theologian and priest wrote: *‘What parents (and a congregation) can offer is a home that is open, a place with safe boundaries within which a child can discover what is helpful and what is harmful... There the child can ask questions without fear...can slowly start listening to his or her own inner self and discover freedom which ultimately gives the child the courage to leave the home and travel on.’*

Today as our high school seniors prepare to leave home and to travel on, I’d like to share additional insights Henri Nouwen wrote in his book Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life about what it means to live a life in the spirit of Christ.

I received a copy of this book during a very low time in my life at seminary when I was questioning most of what I knew about myself. It was a gift from one of my advocates, Dr. Lars Granberg, a Professor at Hope College who encouraged me to go into the ministry. Accompanying the gift was a note about how much this book had meant to him. I immediately poured myself into the pages longing for some answers, for a word of comfort and counsel. Rather than present pat answers, I was invited to listen to my heart, stay with my questions, and look for the answers with which I struggled from within myself.

The premise of Nouwen's book Reaching Out is that before one can reach out, one must first reach within. Nouwen invites us to enter our loneliness and to embrace it. The imagery that Nouwen chooses to depict our journey into loneliness is that of a desert! Not unlike the Israelites who spent forty years in the desert before entering the Promised Land or Jesus who spent forty days in the desert before reaching out in his ministry, each one of our spiritual journeys begins in the desert. In Nouwen's words:

*As hard as it is to believe that the dry desolate desert can yield endless varieties of flowers, (and it does) it is equally hard to imagine that our loneliness is hiding unknown beauty. The movement from loneliness to solitude is the movement from restlessness and fear to rest and openness.*

On this journey, an effective spiritual guide offers us a safe place to stay alone and to find a living well within by reaching deep enough under the surface of our complaints and boredom to discover the joy in our tears and the peace that is possible when we face our fears.

In that living water, in the oasis in the desert, we meet the spirit of the living God in whom we live and move and have our being, our Companion, Advocate and Counselor, and solitude begins to grow out of our loneliness. No longer pulled apart by the noise of the world, we can be nourished in the silence of God and able to view the world from a quiet, inner center.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit and the ascent of our graduates, and we give thanks for those companions, advocates and counselors along the way who tell the glory of God, who reflect the Spirit of God, and who pass the sacred torch of the Holy Spirit from generation to generation. So be it. Amen.