

**The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith**

**Holy Comforter**

**Richmond, VA**

**May 15, 2016; Pentecost**

**Readings:** Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-27

### **God's Perspective, The Gift of Pentecost**

They were gathered together when the Holy Spirit blew in and changed their lives forever...changed the world forever.

The birth of the Church was amazing and powerful, but also confusing -- are they drunk?

No, it's only 9am in the morning.

While it maybe unusual to be drunk at 9am, it can happen, so what about this experience tells us that they were filled with the Holy Spirit rather than a drug or their own power to speak?

Every year we celebrate the Day of Pentecost.

The 50th Day after Easter, after Christ is Risen from the dead, and 10 days after the Ascension, that day, as the story goes, that Jesus, the Risen Christ, ascends into heaven, leaving the disciples in one sense, but promising them that Holy Spirit would come to them and dwell with them.

The Holy Spirit would come to led them into all truth; the Holy Spirit would teach them.

We hear Jesus say in John's Gospel, "...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."

In other versions of this teaching about the Holy Spirit, the Bible is quite clear that all truth for all time is not

found in the Bible, or the past, but that as history proceeds, God, the Holy Spirit, will be with us to teach -- to teach us what to do, how to live, how to honor God in our time, how to be about God's work in the world.

In the Episcopal Church, we look to the Bible, tradition, and reason as we seek to follow God in the complex and changing world in which we live.

This is what is often referred to as the three-legged stool as described by the 16th century English theologian Richard Hooker.

In recent years, some have spoken of a four-legged stool, the fourth leg being "community."

Alone, we are limited in knowing God; together, we help each other, being guided by the Holy Spirit, to discern what God is calling us to do, who God is calling us to be, as individuals and as the Church, this church, Holy Comforter, name for the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecost event was so much about community; showing us that we are one human family.

Other than the fact that the languages the people spoke were not known to them, there are other aspects of the Pentecost event that shows they were not drunk, but that a powerful experience of God was happening.

Community was created among people who were very different from each other.

They could communicate - they could listen to each other.

They were all brothers and sisters even though they came from different cultures, backgrounds, were different races.

The Pentecost event, gave the people God's perspective, that God calls us to be together - we are all God's children.

There are many ways and many times that the Holy Spirit has helped us to know what to do.

In the context of Pentecost, I was so moved, hearted by our presiding bishop's recent words.

On-line, you can see a segment of an interview Judy Woodruff did with Michael Curry, our presiding bishop.

We are told that the full interview will air on PBS soon, on the News Hour, but this segment on its own is powerful.

Judy Woodruff asks if Presiding Bishop Curry has anything to say about ordaining women in the Episcopal Church that might inform the Catholic Church, given that Pope Francis has recently said he would consider setting up a commission to study the idea of allowing women to be deacons in the Roman Catholic Church.

Well, that right there sounds like the movement of the Holy Spirit, and a lot like how the Episcopal Church came to ordain women, though we had an intermediate step of setting apart/ordaining women "deaconesses" who had less authority to lead than deacons did.<sup>1</sup>

This interview had a Pentecost feel to me--asking others

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<sup>1</sup> <http://arc.episcopalchurch.org/women/two/chronology.htm>

in the Christian community, Episcopalians, to share  
with Roman Catholics our experience.

And then, what Bishop Curry said was amazing, going  
beyond what an expected answer might be:

“When we finally got and get to the point of saying, who  
has God called to be a bishop or a priest or a  
deacon.

And we’re going to follow that leading.

What we found over time was, guess what, a priest is a  
priest.

A deacon is a deacon, a bishop is a bishop.

They may be black, white, red, yellow, brown, they may  
be a Republican or a Democrat, they may be a man  
or a woman, they be gay or straight, bisexual,  
transgender, they may be a whole host of things,  
but they’re a priest.

They’re a bishop, they’re a deacon.

You know, my Catholic brothers and sisters, you have to  
make your decision as God leads you.

This is how we have made ours, and-- we’ve been  
blessed.

We have a better Episcopal Church...because we really  
are trying to welcome all.”<sup>2</sup>

What a Pentecost statement!

What a case study about what staying open to the Holy Spirit can mean  
and look like...for the Episcopal Church...and for us...it was  
not fast, to come to what Presiding Bishop Curry  
describes, but the Holy Spirit would not let  
up, and thanks be to God, we as the  
Episcopal Church remained open  
to the Spirit’s leading,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pbsnewshourjudywoodruff/?pnref=story>

even when our cultural experiences, our experience of life and truth was not there yet.

We stayed open to the Holy Spirit, which meant staying in conversation and community with individuals, with science, with our wider culture which was changing faster than the culture of the Church.

Sometimes you hear people say that the Church should not give in to the culture...well, God works through those who are not Christian or not explicitly following the Christian path to teach us.

In another example, isn't God working through science to convince the Church to care for the earth?

As Bishop Curry states, we have been blessed. We know that we are following the lead of the Holy Spirit, when we see and experience and show forth the fruits of the Spirit as given in the Letter to the Galatians: the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against such things (5:22-23).

We see the fruits of the Spirit when we welcome all. The Spirit creates community.

On this day we will welcome newcomers and new members to our church...how appropriate to do so on Pentecost in our church named for the Holy Spirit.

We are blessed to welcome you who are newer to this, your church.

The Holy Spirit has brought us together for a reason, for many reasons...in community, we will continue to discern how the Spirit leads, as our church has done for generations...often pushing the edge of what was acceptable in the Church  
...be that having candles on the altar, or doing prison ministry, or feeding those in need, or standing with the gay community from early days, and even during the scariest days of the initial HIV, then called AIDS.

This is the sort of faith community you have decided to join, all of you, whether our church is new for you or you have been here for years;  
it is always a decision to stay, even when it is not easy, to stay and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Comforter, to be the community of faith we are called to be, for our joy, the benefit of others, and to God's glory. Amen.