

I am struck by the two very different accounts we have of the Pentecost event in the Book of Acts and John's Gospel.

Luke, in Acts, describes the event as happening fifty days after Jesus' resurrection and ten days after his ascension into heaven "suddenly" and with "a sound like the rush of a violent wind" looking like "divided tongues, as of fire" appearing among the disciples who were "all of them filled with the Holy Spirit" and who "began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

In John's gospel, we have the disciples gathered again in the upper room the evening of the resurrection, full of fear because they have no sense of what is to come next, what they are to do next. Jesus simply appears, stands amongst them, and says, "Peace be with you." This is the first they have encountered their risen Lord, who simply shows them his wounds. "Peace be with you," he says again before he commissions them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And with that he breathes on them saying "Receive the Holy Spirit," giving them the power which will enliven them for their mission to spread the gospel.

Today we read John's gospel in multiple languages as a way that mirrors Luke's description, making them seem like the same. But they aren't.

I would describe Luke's Pentecost event as the Holy Spirit hitting the disciples over the head with a two-by-four. There is nothing subtle or gentle about the way this gift is delivered. And there is something healing, unifying, about the ways all, not some, but all, can understand, so that the Good News of the Gospel can be proclaimed throughout the world. If we think back to the Old Testament tale of the Tower of Babel and the way God punished humankind for attempting to reach God in heaven by creating multiple languages so their speech was babbling to each other, this is a restorative act of God, bringing humankind together again so that all can know and love God through Jesus.

But in John the gift is delivered gently, peacefully, and hearkens back to the second creation story in Genesis when God breathed life into the clay form that becomes Adam, man. Here the Spirit is a creative force allowing the disciples to be whom God created them to be, and then go forth and do that which God intends – to spread the Good News of the Gospel. This includes the power to forgive sins, but it comes with a warning; if you do not forgive these sins, you will bear the burden of them yourselves. The gift of forgiveness is often a greater gift for ourselves than for the one whom we forgive, as it gives us the ability to move forward, which is its own gift.

I have experienced the Holy Spirit in both ways, as a two-by-four sure to get my attention, and as a gentle breath waking me to new possibilities.

In the early 2000s as I was discerning my call to the priesthood, I was still working as a teacher in Westerly. I had a 45-minute commute each way, and since the radio in my car didn't work past South County Hospital, much of it was done in silence. I remember distinctly asking God, "if you want me to do this, how?" It was a financial question which was answered with a two-by-four. The

plan became instantly clear and the means presented itself almost immediately. I've always felt the Spirit wanted to make sure I got with the plan.

During the last government shut-down, when the SNAP benefits were in flux, I was behind a woman in the grocery store whose SNAP card would just not work. The cashier was incredibly kind, trying everything she could, but it became obvious this woman was going to have to put items back. It was not a big shopping, and was clearly items she needed. It was then I heard the whisper and handed the clerk my credit card. Of course, the woman resisted, and the clerk wanted her permission first, but she let me when I told her it would make my day. In that moment, the Holy Spirit whispered and three people were blessed.

Thursday morning seven of us gathered to explore this morning's readings. We looked at both ways the gift of the Spirit is given. And we shared, deeply, the ways we have experienced the Holy Spirit active in our own lives, sometimes as a two-by-four and sometimes as a gentle breath.

We are all called by God to do easy and hard things – it is the Spirit that both gets our attention and makes sure we can do what is asked. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit active in your life? Would you be willing to share your experience? With the men's group, the Thursday Bible Study, EfM, at coffee hour? When we are like the disciples gathered, our sharing makes this time even more sacred, allowing us to become more deeply the body of Christ, formed by the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to send, as advocate and guide before he ascended into heaven. It is the Holy Spirit that forms us into one body with many spiritual gifts described by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. It is the Holy Spirit which enlivens our faith and spurs us on to share that faith with a world that desperately needs it right now.

Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. We are formed as the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the waters of baptism. So, in just a moment we will renew our own baptismal covenant. These vows are made in response to the covenant God has already made with us, to love us unconditionally, no exceptions. When loved with such unmerited mercy and kindness, we can't help but love back, as best as is humanly possible, continuing in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, and prayers, loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, seeking and serving Christ in all persons, respecting the dignity of all and working for justice and peace.

We do none of this on our own. It is all with God's help. And most often through the power of the Holy Spirit, who reaches out as we most need, with that proverbial two-by-four or a still, small, gentle breath, so that we may, as much as possible, do all that God would have us do, in response for all that God has done for us.