

Welcoming the Companion

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May 20, 2018 - Pentecost

Friends, welcome to Pentecost. Many of you know the story; we hear it every year at this time. The disciples were gathered together, and suddenly a mighty wind filled the house; and the Spirit enabled them to speak in other languages so the Good News could be spread to all the world. Indeed the Christian Pentecost has sometimes been seen as the undoing of the Tower of Babel story. In the eleventh chapter of Genesis we read how humanity exhibited such pride, such egomania, as to attempt to build a tower to heaven and thus to “make a name for themselves.” And God confused their language, give them different languages to break them apart, and thus to break their self-righteousness.

And so, at Pentecost, God enabled all the world to hear the Good News, each in his or her own language, thus uniting the people in one flock under the guidance of the one shepherd, Jesus, the Christ. It’s a wonderful story. I love the story. It appeals to my sense of organization – things have come full circle. Out of one, there were many; and now the many are brought back together into one people, one flock, one family of God.

But today, at least for a moment, I want to go back to the Gospel of John. It was read a few moments ago: “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.” (John 15:26) Forgive me, but I’m going to throw another Greek word at you. I really try not to include too much Greek or Hebrew in my sermons, but there are some words that are just so much richer in the original language that the academic in me just can’t resist. Today it’s the word for “advocate.” The Greek word is *paraclete*.

In 2011, Christianity celebrated the 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible. In recognition of that event, a group of publishers and biblical scholars came together to issue a new translation of the Bible called the Common English Bible. They’re goal was to create a Bible that used everyday language and was still an accurate translation. I mention this because, in the past few weeks I have quoted the Common English Bible on several occasions. I enjoy reading it. In some cases; I think they’ve done an excellent job with the translation. In others, I think it’s a bit of a stretch, but it is definitely meaningful and provocative. I tell you this because the Common English Bible translates that word *paraclete* for which your pew Bible uses “advocate” as “companion.” Jesus says, “When the *companion* comes, he will testify about me.” I like that. That word *paraclete* means all of that. When I looked it up in a Greek dictionary, I find: advocate, helper, counselor, defender, intercessor, encourager. That’s the Holy Spirit... all of these things wrapped into one. In my recent Agape newsletter column, I

commented that I don't make a sharp distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the risen Christ. It's that same Spirit that walks with us always, even to the end of the age. It's a loving Spirit. It's a Spirit of Truth. And so, I really like thinking of the Holy Spirit as *a Companion*.

So let's get back to Pentecost. A mighty wind has swept through the room. You know, in both Greek and in Hebrew, the word for wind is the same as the word for Spirit. A mighty wind, a mighty Spirit, has swept through the room. Do you feel it? Do you sense it? It's here. I tell you it's here in this church. There is love in this church. There is commitment in this church. There is caring and sharing in this church. There is a whole group of wonderful people in this church. And what makes all that the case? The realization that the Spirit of the risen Christ is our companion, walking beside us, loving us, caring for us, guiding us, and leading us. Indeed, I love the concept that the Spirit of Christ is our constant companion, your companion and my companion.

Friends, I've watch things happen in the church over the last few years. I've watched our 50th Anniversary and a grand celebration. More importantly, I've watch the development of *Our Faithful Journey*, our long range plan; and I've seen a transformation. I've seen some of our committees gain new excitement and new emphasis. I've watched our attendance and our membership grow. Then, Dover Players came to us looking for a home. It seemed like a fit, and new opportunity to reach out to the community and to bring the community to the church. It is an exciting time at NOUMC. Things seem to be falling in place at just the right time; and it's a joy to watch.

It's not my doing, and it's not your doing; although both you and I support it with our efforts and our finances. But I tell you it is led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Christ, our constant companion.

I need to tell you, I only have one fear; and that is that, over time, we will allow the fire to go out. Over time, we'll get tired of hearing about *Our Faithful Journey*. Over time, it will start to become somehow old. It's a natural thing, but we must not let it happen. It's now been six months since we passed out these booklets. I hope you still have yours. If you don't, you can pick up another on the table in fellowship hall or contact the office. We've also recently posted it on the church website. But this should not be a one-time read and forget about it, or read and ignore it. No, I hope that you will regularly review this booklet. I hope that each of you will hold the leadership of this church, myself included, accountable for moving this plan forward. I also hope that each of you will ask yourself what role you can play in moving this plan forward. I tell you this is Spirit driven. This is a part of this church's Pentecost.

But I also know, that the Spirit is not just about this church. It's about each and every one of us personally, because the companion walks with each and every one of us personally. The companion leads us and guides us. The companion cares for us and loves us; and the very realization of this companionship is one of

the great joys of our faith. To know our companion is to know the amazing love that God has for each of us, personally and individually.

May we never lose sight of the love of our companion; and may we walk in his peace each and every day of our lives. Thanks be to God for the gift of the Spirit.

Let us pray. . .

Holy God,

We thank you and we praise you
for your presence in our lives.

Lead us and guide us as you walk with us
that we may always walk in the path of peace and love
as we follow in service to you.

Amen