

-Happy Pentecost to all of you. Now for most of my life, that statement has been meaningless. As a youth I remember everyone coming to church wearing the color red and I was like: what is going on here? Pentecost still, like many church seasons, has a foreign quality to it that seems detached from our otherwise busy, hectic lives. So let's break this down really quick: Holy Spirit aside (we will get to that in a minute), I should actually begin by saying to y'all HAPPY BIRTHDAY! Happy birthday! Yes, Pentecost is the day in which we celebrate the ministry of proclaiming the gospel going from Jesus' close inner circle of disciples out into the world: first the diaspora Jews, then the gentiles of the Roman Empire, then the people of far off lands like Ethiopia, and finally people of the new world: us. Pentecost is when we celebrate this "going forth" and the birth date of the global church. So, in this spirit of Pentecost, let us sing happy birthday to the church: *Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday Christian Church. Happy birthday to you!*

-Pentecost: the birthdate of the church. Beyond being just a birthday, however, Pentecost also focuses on the Holy Spirit dwelling with the world. I remember as a kid I had the hardest time conjuring up an answer to the question: what was the Holy Spirit?

-If any of you have seen the British comedian Eddy Izaard, he has this hilarious routine of God listening to Christian protestant singing and talking with Jesus and the Holy Ghost about it. Jesus can't talk for very long because the Holy Ghost keeps floating around and saying: "holy ghost....holy ghost...." A very simplistic and hilarious image. But I don't know about you, this is kinda the way I thought of the Holy Spirit as a kid. This thing with a sheet over it's head bouncing around from God like Casper the ghost.

-I think this is in a way how many people see the Holy Spirit. It's this detached concept that really has nothing to do with them.

-So maybe this Pentecost, instead just "celebrating the church's birthday" and lifting up all of these detached descriptions of the Holy Spirit, we should delve deeper into connecting with a Holy Spirit that makes sense and challenges us in positive ways.

-On the surface, our gospel text from John is a little bit of a let down for us doing this. There's no tongues of fire, no hilarious questions of whether these disciples are drunk, no "Braveheart" type of speech from Peter proclaiming everyone to call on the name of the Lord.

-But don't get discouraged just yet! There is actually a lot in John that I think can help us connect with the spirit of Pentecost.

-The first thing that is interesting about this gospel text is the word that John uses to describe the Spirit. It's a very unusual, highly unique term to this gospel (one that possibly even the gospel writer created for this purpose). The greek word is *paraclete*.

-Because this word is notoriously difficult to translate without losing key components of its meaning, many translators avoid the problem altogether and simply translate the word as "spirit" or like we have here: advocate. The Greek noun Paraclete is actually

two words (like a lot of the gospel of John's unique words) combined: *para-* 'alongside' + *klētos* (from *kalein* 'to call'). Literally, it reads "the one who is called alongside."

-John's point here is clear: God never leaves us. Let me say that again: *God never leaves us*. God is alongside us for the duration. Even when Jesus seems to leave the disciples, God's presence is even more clear in the presence of the *paraclete*.

-Then this gospel text uses another word which is interesting: Spirit of Truth. (*penuma tees alethias*) "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." (verse 26)

-Here we have an interchange of two terms that provide a glimpse of how the Holy Spirit related to John's community.

-This "Spirit of truth" term is super cool because it most likely connects to a question Pontius Pilate asks Jesus during his trial (does anyone remember what that question was?) "What is truth?" (John 18:38) The *paraclete*, the one who is called alongside, brings us that answer.

- But here is the kicker: The truth that the Spirit of truth brings is clearly meant to be relational, not theoretical or even necessarily logical. According to John 16:13, the Spirit of truth "will guide you into all the truth". The Greek verb that describes the Spirit's action here is *hodegeo*, which combines the noun *hodos*, "way" and the verb *ago*, "I lead the way." Putting all of this together then, we have: The Paraclete, the one who is called alongside, leads Jesus' followers in the way of all truth, and of course John's community knows that Jesus himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (see John 14:6). Thus, the charge of Pentecost is this: Those who know Jesus' character as revealed in his actions, words, and love are called to lead their own lives shaped by those words and deeds. This is what we call the church at its very basic level: a community shaped by Jesus Christ's presence, trying to live our lives with love for one another in the same way with God's spirit (the paraclete) by our side. *That* is the essence of Pentecost.

-Our world needs Pentecost, the paraclete, and the Spirit of truth more today than ever before. Just look at our schools and the frightening patterns of mass shootings that continue to kill people, just like the 8 students and 2 teachers who lost their lives this past Friday. Just look at the mistrust of one another and the polarization in finding solutions as a society to huge problems such as this one. I don't need to remind you that people continue to be persecuted, vilified, and dehumanized.

-It's easy to get discouraged, put down, even depressed when we let the innocent loss of life hit us, I'm wrestling with that myself right now. But maybe this is when the words of Jesus, the beloved Son, need to ring even louder: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:13) That's what we are trying to live out the very best way we can. We need to keep living that commandment out, again and again and again. We need help in one another, and yes, help from the Holy Spirit if

we are to at all address the significant problems of the world today like keeping our children safe.

-So yes, we can happily sing “happy birthday to the church”, but if Pentecost stops there we’ve lost. May the *Paraclete, the Spirit of truth* deepen us, encourage us, and open us up. May the Holy Spirit be relevant and vibrant in your life today and always. Amen.