

## Pentecost

When I took English class in high school, one teacher had a technique for lessons in public speaking, and I hated it. Not every day, but when you did not expect it, he would look around the room and point at one person in the class. You would have to come up front and stand facing everyone else. Then the teacher would give you a topic like “Bicycles” or “Squirrels,” and you had to give a spontaneous speech on that theme. As if that weren’t enough, when you were done, he asked everyone else in the class to criticize your presentation. The goal was to help us gain self-confidence, but it was largely an exercise in humility.

You have probably had moments when in front of other people or just in conversation with someone you were on the spot to say something, and you failed to find the right words. In social media people sometimes post statements they wish they could take back. But you have probably had other moments when miraculously you said the right words. As a parent you gave spot-on advice to your child that made a difference; as an applicant you said the right things in your interview and got the job; as a suitor you spoke the words that finally won the heart of the person you loved more than anyone else. When you think about it later, you wonder, “Where did those words come from?” We may say amazing things we could never have practiced. Some people take all the credit for their brilliance. But Jesus gave the credit to another source: the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ disciples were incompetent before he died and fearful afterward. But something happened at that first Pentecost. Something drove them out of that upper room into the world to proclaim Christ with such fervor that - well, look where we are today. Many people say, “It had to be the Holy Spirit. There is no other explanation for why Christianity developed the way it did.”

In John’s gospel Jesus predicted these developments. Once on the last day of the Feast of Booths, when people made water offerings in the Temple, Jesus said to his disciples, “Rivers of living water will flow from within [the one] who believes in me.” John explains that Jesus said this of the Holy Spirit. Later in the same gospel in the upper room after the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, the Father “will give you another Advocate to be with you always.” Then he added, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” Jesus knew he was going away, but he also knew the Holy Spirit would be with us to the end of time. He describes a Spirit that comes not just once on a past Pentecost to transform a handful of followers, but again and again even to us today, starting with our confirmation.

The Spirit comes when we pray over the scriptures, the inspired writings that remind us all that Jesus told his disciples. The Spirit comes when we receive and heed good advice, teaching us everything. Then, if we have developed these two spiritual habits - studying the scripture and listening for God in the words of those around us - we are so filled with the Holy Spirit that we will share the same Spirit with others. We will say the right words in the right situations. Those words may come to us seemingly by our own brilliance or even by chance, but if we practice the experience of Christ in our hearts, the Holy Spirit will more easily move our lips.

Sunday, June 9, 2019