

***“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”*** (St. John 14.27)

Have you ever been cooped up at home while listening to the sound of a rushing, howling wind? I know I have. Perhaps you remember July 2014, when Tropical Storm Arthur ripped through the region? And I know the fear that can sometimes come with the noise – the chance of damage, the loss of electricity, the darkness of the sky, and in certain places, the risk of a tornado.

Around two thousand years ago, as we read in our Lesson, the disciples of Jesus were gathered together to celebrate the *Feast of Weeks*. 52 days ago, they were gathered and feared for their lives after witnessing Jesus die on the cross. 50 days ago, they were astonished that Jesus was alive again. 10 days ago, they watched as Jesus, their teacher, mentor, and friend, was carried up into heaven in the clouds. And now here they were. Gathered. Maybe scared again. Unsure of what they were supposed to do now. Jesus had left – but yet, it was a feast. “Suddenly, there came a sound of heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” As we might think of it, the sound of a hurricane on an otherwise clear day. All the confusion and noise and howling wind happening all at once, so that nobody could think why. This had not been in the weather forecast, there had been no dark clouds – nobody expected it. It was so sudden and so strange that anyone in the city who heard it came to see what was going on.

But this was no destructive storm. This wasn’t anything dangerous. This was, in fact, the coming of the Comforter – the coming of the Spirit of God as was promised by Christ. Tongues of fire rested upon each of their heads, and they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. All the assembled crowds heard the message – the proclamation of the Kingdom by the Apostles – in their own languages, and the crowd was surprised and in awe.

This day that we now know by the word *Pentecost*, comes from the Greek for “50 days”, referring to the Festival the Jews were gathered for in Jerusalem. To us, Pentecost is 50 days after Easter, and is the day we know the Holy Spirit came to the apostles – which some Christians celebrate as a kind of birthday of the Church. For the Jews gathered, it was the feast of Weeks, or *Shavuot*, being celebrated for the wheat harvest – 50 days after the beginning of the Passover festival. Our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy speaks to this *Feast of Weeks*. The Lord commands in Deuteronomy the people to count seven weeks after the first of the wheat harvest, before celebrating a festival. So, while *Shavuot* remains an important time in the Jewish calendar, its Greek sister-word, *Pentecost*, has now become intimately tied to the coming of the Spirit to the Church.

And even though the rushing wind was a surprise, the coming of the Spirit was expected. As we hear in the Gospel, Jesus foretold the coming before he went up to heaven. Jesus said he will pray to the Father to send another comforter after he leaves, to abide with those who love him forever. He says the world does not know the Spirit, but his followers do know the Spirit because it is *his* spirit whom they already know. The Holy Spirit will teach everything, remind of Jesus’ teachings, and always be with his followers. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, but only those who love and follow him. Recently, I had a conversation with somebody outside the Church who was asking me about this “Holy Spirit thing”. What was it, and why did Christians talk about ghosts? Surprisingly, he knew that some Christian denominations devoted much more of their time to talking about the Spirit than others. But he couldn’t figure it out. I asked him if he was a Star Wars fan, and since he was, I tried to explain The Spirit like Obi-Wan Kenobi did in the first Star Wars movie from 1977: “*The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.*” Except, my version was something like “The Spirit is what gives a *Christian* his power. It’s the living spirit of Jesus who surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the Church together.” He thought I was crazy – fair enough. To be honest, it’s not that much easier to teach about the Spirit with a bunch of Christians, either. I know that last month, in Confirmation classes, it didn’t go much better. We are surrounded by the mystery of the Spirit every day of our lives as Christians – it is the Holy Spirit that really makes and holds the Church together – and yet it is pretty hard to explain in practice what we mean. And if we have a hard time with it, then how are we supposed to explain the concept to others?

Michael Ramsay, 100<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury, explains the Spirit as the best gift God can give us: *“If God so utterly loves us, He will want to give to each of us the greatest gift He could possibly give, and that gift is nothing less than Himself. The gift of the Holy Spirit; it means literally God in you: God on the soil of Palestine, the Lord Jesus; God the infinite creator, the Father; God literally in you in the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost and given through the ministrations of His Church all down the ages.”*

As opposed to the Force in Star Wars, The Holy Spirit is not just “a force” in the universe, but is *the* living, breathing spirit of the living God by which the world was made, and through which all things have life. The Spirit, as a member of the Holy Trinity, “proceeds *from* the Father and the Son, and is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God” – says the 5<sup>th</sup> of our 39 Anglican Articles of Religion (BCP p. 700). This Spirit of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son – is a force of movement and life in the created world, and the glue which binds God’s people together. And the Spirit lives and moves about as he pleases because he is alive.

This same spirit was at work throughout the Old Testament, too. He was present and active in creation (Genesis 1, Job 26:13, Isaiah 32:15), was breathing life into creatures and dry bones at the command of God (Genesis 2, Ezekiel 37), dwelling in various judges, warriors and prophets such as Joshua (Numbers 27:18), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:25), and Saul (1 Sam 10:9-10). The Spirit entered and breathed through the prophets, just as when David declared that “the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” in 2 Samuel 23, and the prophet Ezekiel said “the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me” (2.2).

And now that the Spirit was sent to dwell in those who follow and love Jesus, the Spirit is with us all the time as believers. For our Lord says, *“when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you”* (St. John 16.7-13). Jesus tells us that the Spirit is responsible for teaching, reminding, convicting, guiding, glorifying God. And St. Paul tells us much more of the gifts that come by the Spirit. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians he tells us *“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues”* (1 Cor 12:8-10).

We receive the gift of the Spirit in our Baptism to wash away our sins. At Confirmation, the Spirit descends upon us to strengthen our spiritual gifts. At the Eucharist, the Spirit acts to make the bread and wine we consume to be the Body and Blood of Christ. We live in the Spirit, we are enlivened by the Spirit, we are empowered by the Spirit. As members of the Body of Christ – the Church – the Spirit of Christ is among us and moves between us and creates that special bond that all Christians have – that we all belong to Christ and his Father. Through Jesus, we are all adopted as sons and daughters by God and are given *his own Spirit* to dwell in us forever. As Archbishop Ramsay says – this is the greatest of all possible gifts, for what gift could be better than God himself.

While we remember the gift of the Spirit received by the Apostles all those years ago, we must look to how the Spirit is leading us all today – each in our own vastly different directions – and we need to pray and discern about where God is leading each and every one of us. God is always at work, and His Spirit moves among us.

In his second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul talks about Moses, the leader of the Israelites, and how when Moses was in the presence of the Lord, his face shone bright from the Lord’s Glory. He would cover his face with a veil so as not to frighten his countrymen. St. Paul says that when we turn to Christ, that veil is removed so as not to hide the glory of his death and resurrection. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his [Christ’s] likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3.18). May we all, on this Pentecost, behold the glory of the Lord and be changed into his likeness to then show it forth to the world around us in all we say and do.

The world cannot receive the Spirit, but the world does receive us. Let us be examples of the glory of God in the world, and dwell in the peace of Christ. If we are afraid, the Spirit will strengthen and comfort us to do the work. For Jesus tells us, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

And so we pray: Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Amen.