

So, it is Pentecost! Many people wearing red, to symbolize fire. We read about a sound like the rushing of wind, and visions of flames dancing on people's heads, some sort of electricity or energy between the people, a common language of praise and trust in God!

Yet a "pandemic Pentecost" today has people still fearful of coming to church, not keen on wearing masks a bit longer, trying to connect from computer to computer, but not the joy of seeing each other face to face. What can we learn from that early story to help us with the idea and experience of the Holy Spirit?

Well, Jesus did say to his followers, *I must go away* for the Spirit to come to you; He even emphasized it more by saying it is "to your advantage" that I go away, so that the Spirit can guide you and lead you. In his very life and body, Jesus was teaching a basic truth of life that we have what it takes inside of us, that we too can grow into people that can be guided by divine Spirit, Holy Spirit just as he was. Think of the basic truth of parents and children, that if the parent does everything for the child, or is always there to teach and guide, the child will never develop certain abilities. The mother bird always pushes the baby out of the nest, always has to let go at some point if the little bird is going to learn to fly. We all have to learn and grow, often by trial and error. So it is with our spiritual life; we get lessons and guidance from parents and Sunday school teachers, but ultimately we go through that maturing, coming of age time, where we learn to follow the guidance of God from our own readings and prayers and inner prompting of God's Spirit.

It would be easier to have Jesus physically at our side for all issues where we need guidance; it can be hard to discern many issues and roads to take in life; many decisions are not easy and we know ethics are complex. Jesus says that one way to conceive of "the Holy Spirit" is as the "Spirit of Truth." It seems that there are some things that are true for all people everywhere, call them basic truths, absolute or divine truths. People need food to live, people also

need the food of connection or love to thrive. People need shelter from harsh weather, or any harmful thing in life. We remember that there are basic or “self-evident” truths that all (men) are created equal, with the rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness.” It seems to me an “absolute truth” that all people everywhere do indeed desire more peace and less violence, though we may disagree on the means or methods to get there.

So letting the Holy Spirit guide us “into all truth,” as Jesus says, is not an easy matter. For we know that much about truth is relative, even subjective; my idea or experience of what is true will not be exactly the same as yours! And what we thought was true as children may not be the truth we see as adults! For example, think of the notion of God; a childlike view is often one of a very distant figure, sometimes like a Santa Claus with simple reward system for good and bad behavior, sometimes giving us all the answers to life in one book. Then we grow, explore the world, and find many different notions of God in different cultures.

We ask many questions and ponder what seems true or what sounds true to us. Many of our questions are ethical ones. For example if we start with a basic or eternal truth that all life is precious, how can we murder, take a life, whether we are talking about war, or death penalty, or abortion or euthanasia. Is it true that taking life is wrong and that nurturing or preserving life is good? If so, then we have an ethical conundrum all the time. What we choose to do is often the “lesser of two evils” which in itself is a subjective truth. We often differ as to which path is the “lesser or two evils” We often ask, does the end justify the means? Is there some greater good that might come from destruction before new creation? (Think of forest fires that sometimes are necessary for new growth to happen.)

I strongly believe that when Jesus said “the Spirit of Truth will guide you into all truth” he meant that we will always wrestle with decisions in our lives, what is the best course of action to take in an

imperfect world full of good and evil. But the good news he says is although he went away physically, his words and his Spirit are very near, even dwell inside of us, so that we can trust we will be guided or “led” in our lives. Jesus surely knew that the world is a constantly changing and evolving place; so there are new decisions and circumstances that we will always need to make choices about for which he could not prepare us. Jesus had no specific teachings about climate change, about vaccinations and masks, about voting laws and forms of government. We have to decide many of these things based on eternal truths like the good of loving one’s neighbor, doing our best to be peacemakers and to bring good news to any who are poor or oppressed. A basic truth of the Bible I would say is that from Moses to Jesus and all the prophets in between, leaders were trying to make the world a better place, create more love and justice, “liberty and justice for all!”

Our UCC executive conference minister, Rev. Darrell Goodwin, emphasized this aspect of the Holy Spirit, that the goodness of God is for ALL people, that there has been a big lie over the years, yes, even in churches, that there has been an in-group or an exclusive group of Christians (think Puritans and those with puritanical thoughts). Rather, the truth of Jesus is that he was indeed very inclusive, about who he hung out with, ate and drank with, about who he included at his table (yes, even Judas). The UCC has done well, in my opinion, to always say the “love AND justice” of Jesus, meaning not only the personal forgiveness and salvation, but the work we can all do to make this world a better place.

So the first disciples at Pentecost heard the rush of a wind, saw or felt electricity of the Spirit moving them... moving them to Praise God, for good things they had experienced, for mercy in the past, But then they also began to look to the future, as Peter boldly quoted the prophet Joel and proclaimed, “Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams!” And “I will pour out my spirit

on all flesh,” says God. Joel and Peter themselves are examples of an indwelling spirit of boldness and truth and they are promising the same to “all flesh,” both young and old! They and Jesus proclaim and promise a divine Spirit, a Spirit of Truth, for all God’s children. So we can feel good about speaking our own truth, sharing the truth as we know it, from the depths of our mind and heart. We study and learn about God, the prophets, and Jesus, but then Jesus says, “I must go away” if you are to receive the full expression of the Spirit IN YOU.

I wrote a song (a way I express the Spirit) years ago that I think still holds true in its basic convictions. It’s about God’s calling, specifically about Jacob/Israel wrestling all night with an angel, about our doubts and frailties as “earthen vessels,” but also the possibility of **Praise** all our lives, living boldly in the world with God’s creativity, Jesus’ incarnate love, and the Spirit’s truth and power.

1. *I have heard you, You have called me, Who are you, Show yourself!
You have stirred me, I have wrestled, for your blessing til daylight.*

***Great are your servants of compassion,
close are your saints of light.***

Great is the love and hope you give, conquering fears of night.

2. *You have heard me, you have held me, you are God of Holy Love.
You have fed me, and restored me, Love incarnate from above.*

Praise to you, O God creator, Praise you Son of Light.

Praise to you Eternal Spirit, now my joy my life!

3. *Earthen vessels, often broken, never driven to despair.
Jesus Christ, our sure redeemer, new life spring forth everywhere.*

Praise to you, O God creator, Praise you Son of Light.

Praise to you Eternal Spirit, now my joy my life!

4. *So I’ll follow where you lead me, knowing you are by my side.
I will serve you, I will praise you, speak your truth with love and might!*