

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
June 4, 2017
John 7:37-39

Pentecost: the descent, or coming of the Holy Spirit. The promise that Jesus made to his disciples and followers that they would not be left alone after he was gone.

In today's reading from the gospel of John, Jesus describes what will happen when this Spirit is sent and received: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." Wow, this two short sentences that say an awful lot!

To start, it's clear that a person must become aware of their *need*. Someone must be *thirsty* to want to come to Jesus. And that person must believe their thirst *will be* quenched. Once quenched, that person, in turn, will become a source of living water for others. Out of their heart will flow a lot of life – RIVERS – of living water.

Unless we know we are in need, we will not come for the living water. This is an interesting image because it's well known now that by the time a person feels thirsty, they are already dehydrated. In fact, so many people have mistaken and ignored the signal for thirst, that in this part of the world, the internal signal sometimes no longer works and people suffer chronically from the effects of unquenched thirst; kidney stones, cholesterol problems, constipation, and liver, joint and muscle damage, fatigue, confusion and so on. Our brains and hearts are made up of 73% water; our lungs, 83%. *We need* water!

And ironically, here in Canada, we have more water than most people in the world. Yet we remain so unaware!

Powerful metaphor! How many of us forget to turn to our Creator to have our needs met and try and meet them with strategies that do not satisfy? We pursue the things of this world as if they could satisfy – wealth, power, possessions, status symbols, toys, etc. Things satisfy for a while and then we're on acquiring the next thing. We are drinking of things that do not satisfy, can't, and never will.

Another key idea in this passage is *relationship*. Are we in relationship with our Creator? Or focused in on ourselves? In this individualistic society we value self-sufficiency. And our readings today challenge this idea. We don't need others. We can do it alone. We can manage the future; prepare for our retirement; prevent our suffering and discomfort.

Yet, we're told that it's from our relationship with Jesus that we will be given more than we need. We will be given the kind of nourishment that we really need, that will see us into fullness of life and beyond, and that we, in turn, will be able to share this life with others and provide what others need. Not on our own, but through the abundance of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, in human form, could only reach the people with whom he came in contact. But in his promise of the sending of the Holy Spirit, he will impact, through relationship with those who believe, many, many more people. History has proven this to be true!

And so this very short passage from John today captures how the Spirit will work when Jesus is no longer on earth.

Now I'd like to look at the passage from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 12: 3b-13) because in this passage we get a view from the other side of time. Jesus has died, and been resurrected, and as we heard in the reading from Acts, the Holy Spirit has been given to his disciples and received. We learn how the early Christ followers begin creating the early Church.

Now, many people like to idealize the early Church as unified and in agreement on all matters. But right from the beginning, as we learn from Paul, the Church struggles. People had different ideas, there were different leaders and leadership styles and people were competing to understand and portray the gospel message.

In today's reading Paul talks about the variety of gifts, services and activities people have and are engaged in. He says, "All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses." He is chastising a community for the way they are competing with each other and claiming that certain gifts, like speaking in tongues, are better than others.

Paul is brilliant in his use of the image of the Body to illustrate the concept of diversity of unity being of one source. He turns upside down the idea of body, which was disparaged by the Greek and philosophical world of his time. He uses the image to say that the whole can not work without each part. And in this way, says that all gifts, all people are necessary and valued. Each person is created and gifted with their particular contribution to the community. Each belongs. And the diversity of gifts is all held in the unity of Christ.

Diversity and unity. Now this can be a challenging truth to hold. Yet in holding both, we come close to the life of the Holy Spirit, which values each expression of God in the unity of Love.

And so it has been through time: our contribution to, and participation in, this body of Christ is not about ourselves individually, but ourselves as a community – we build on what has come before, and we are faithful to those who will come after, exploring and expressing what it means to live LOVE.

Unlike the body image used in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, the body in this reading from Paul today does not place Christ at the head, but rather the believers and Christ *belong together*. How many of us long to belong? And here Paul gives us the image to work towards and into – a body where every part is needed to function well and valued as such. We are all needed. And no one part is worth more than the other. All are precious expressions of God’s life and love.

So the message to us today is that this world *has received* the Holy Spirit. Each of us, as we acknowledge our need, can be open to receiving the Spirit. This Spirit enlivens the gifts we were born to contribute to the well being of the body, the community of Christ. Our gifts are not for our own satisfaction although it can be said that finding ways to fully offer one’s gift can be a source of true happiness.

And as a body, we are a changing, growing, adapting entity. In fact, in the short time I’ve been here at St. Mary’s, this community has changed remarkably. People have come, people have gone, we’ve had members get ill and several die. People have moved to be near their

children to receive the support and care they need while others have retired out here to this piece of paradise.

The body of St. Mary's expression of Christ's church here on earth is unique, just as each of us is unique.

We have many gifts to offer; and the best ones are the ones we feel drawn to contribute. The ones that stretch us, that give us joy, that help us feel that sense of belonging. Our gifts are not necessarily the things we are good at. Those might be the way we hide away; by doing what we feel comfortable with. Our gifts might be our growing edge; the place where we feel unsure, vulnerable. And certainly our gifts change over time. For instance, it's pretty difficult to be a mentor when you're in your youth. Or a grief counsellor as a teenager. Many gifts emerge and will change over time.

But the one thing all gifts have in common, is that they serve one purpose – serving the world that our God created. So St. Mary's needs the different gifts of each member to become fully alive and responsive to the Spirit.

In Paul's image of the body we see how diversity and unity live as one. We sing this truth in the hymn we sing as we come up individually for communion: One Bread, one Body.

And so as we approach the altar this morning to receive holy nourishment, let us yearn for that which the Holy Spirit is longing to give, life for us, and life for all.

Amen.

