

John 15:26-27; 16:4-11
Pentecost & Confirmation 2024
May 19 & 20, 2024

Well, did you see them? Did you see the northern lights a little over a week ago? We did. (Some have heard me tell the story of us going to see if we could find them.) It was about 10 pm, Friday night. We were watching the news talk about how spectacular they would be to see. It's rare for them to be seen in this part of the country. So, my wife and I looked at each other, and said: *"Should we go and see if we could find them?"* So, we hopped into the car and off we go heading west. We had to get on the other side of a line of storms coming through. When we got to the other side of the rain, there was clear sky. At first, we could only see some white wispy clouds. By that time, all kinds of people had posting pictures of clouds with a variety of colors. We began to think: *what are we doing wrong?* So, when you don't know the answer, you go to the best resource: Google.

Google told us that if you want to see the colors, you need to use your cell phone. The camera on the phone needed to be turned on to *night mode*. That setting lets the lens of the camera stay open for a few seconds. When you looked through the camera on my phone, then the colors popped out. Everywhere we went, the sky was now filled with color through my phone. So, we just kept driving trying to see more colors and different colors in the sky. Five hours later, around 3am, we returned back to the house. It was crazy to do, but we were not the only ones out looking for the northern lights that night. When we stood on the shore of Mauthe Lake in the Northern Kettle Moraine Forest at 2am, we were not alone. Yet, we were glad that we went out to see one of those *once in a lifetime moment*.

Just like we needed the camera on my phone to see all the colors, the disciples needed the Holy Spirit to open the words of the Bible so they could see God's word with clear eyes. As Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, he would give his disciples a pretty big command: **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19-20) How are they going to carry out that command? That seems almost impossible to do.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text, it was the night before his death. Even at that point, I'm not sure that Jesus' disciples understood what Jesus was telling them. **"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."** Jesus had prepared his disciples as best as he could for what was laid in front of them. Yet, he also knew that they couldn't do this on their own. So, he promised to send them the **"Advocate"** – the **"Paraclete."** A **"paraclete"** is the Greek words for the **"Advocate."** So, what is a *paraclete*? It is a person who walks along side with someone to encourage them, to comfort them, to plead for them before a court. The *Paraclete* is a perfect word to describe the Holy Spirit and his work in us. For he stands alongside of us. He pleads our case before God the Father. He has made us one with God by working faith in our hearts. He encourages us to comfort others with the same message of hope and comfort that we have in Christ.

When I read through the essays of the confirmands, there seemed to be some common threads that ran through them. There are the threads of uncertainty. They are the threads of reality of the struggles that we face in life. They know that Satan is going to tempt them. They know that there is a real danger of falling away from Jesus. Yet, they also know that God will remain there. Jesus will pick them up. Jesus will encourage them. Yet, there is another common thread that runs through them: *God is generous with his mercy.* Look at how many times that each of them said that God would always be there for them.

That's what the Holy Spirit does. That's why today is such a big day in the Christian Church. It's not just your Confirmation. It is Pentecost. It is a day that we celebrate Jesus pouring out the Holy Spirit on his disciples, but also on us. For many people in the world today, they have no idea what the Festival of Pentecost is about. We don't see any *Pentecost Sales* in the papers or online. There are no *Pentecost meals* at people's homes today. Yet, Pentecost removes fear from our lives. It is through the Holy Spirit's work on Pentecost that brought everyone of you here to church today. It is the faith that these 5 young people have expressed today.

Think about that day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples. There was the sound of a mighty rushing wind. A loud sound drawing the attention of lots of people. When they came to see what the sound was, they saw the disciples of Jesus with flames of fire on their heads. The flames were real, but they did not harm the disciples. The people also heard these disciples speaking in their own native languages about the wonders or miracles of God. Large crowds of people listen to Peter and the others talk about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. 3,000 people came to faith that day. On that day, the Christian Church grew from 120 to 3,000.

On that day, they didn't see the Holy Spirit, but they did see what he did. We can't see the wind, but we can see what it does. We can see the dust that is picked up by the wind, but we can't see the wind itself. The Holy Spirit did not come upon us with flames of fire on our heads, but he didn't come upon you through the waters of Baptism. We see that Holy Spirit come through our words and actions.

I want to share a brief story I heard last week. The upper grades of our school had gone to a Milkman baseball game at Franklin field. The day was kind of grey, wet and dreary day. The game went into overtime. By the time it ended, there were only two schools left – ours and another school. After the game, you picked up any trash that may have been around you. Then you saw the custodial staff cleaning up in the stands around you. You began to help them pick up more than just what was around you. I understand that they were pretty impressed with your actions. That's what the Holy Spirit does through you. He brings you to faith, he strengthens your faith, he moves you to show that faith in words and actions.

Well did you see them? You may not have seen the northern lights, but you have seen what God has done for you. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. May the young people who confess their faith this weekend, always hold on to their faith in Jesus Christ. May God bless all of you. Amen.