

Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-17

“He abides with you”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Today with Christians around the world, we celebrate the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit who gives the church unity, allowing us to understand one another in the midst of our linguistic, cultural and national difference. Yet we have heard this message for so long that perhaps we don’t stand in awe of the abiding power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we aren’t “amazed and perplexed” like the people of many nations on that first Pentecost Day.

I read parts of the gospel today in Japanese because it is proof to me that hearing about God’s deeds of power in the language of another nation opens us to hearing the Holy Spirit alive through the witness of many nations. Many of you may not understand that particular language, but this congregation itself is evidence that the Holy Spirit continues to gather us in diversity so that through one another’s words, we might know God’s mighty deeds of power. Look around you, you will see dear friends in Christ; you will see people who came from this region and different regions of this nation; you will see people of different nations, who also speak different languages. Yet by the abiding power of the Holy Spirit we have been made into one body, the church.

Today is also a celebration of the ecumenical dimension of the church. The familiar word, “ecumenical,” is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “household.” The church is one household of God – one *oikos* of many nations. The church is one body in Christ. It is probably no mistake that the movement toward modern ecumenism began not in Europe or North America, but in places of incredible difference and diversity. Beginning in India in 1825, in Japan in 1872, in China in 1877, local churches and missionaries from around the world began to experience a unity in Christ they had not known in their home countries. At that time in Europe and North America, denominations were so divided by theological difference and misunderstanding that the unity of Pentecost seemed like a distant dream and a modern impossibility.

The nineteenth century was also an era of high colonialism and strong nationalism in which commercial profit drove nations to conquer others nations and their peoples. Colonialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America sought to enforce unity through uniformity with colonizing world powers. However, it was local churches and missionaries who discerned the movement of the Holy Spirit seeking to unify the church through the diverse gifts and languages of others. Though

theology and politics had divided the churches of Europe and North America, the Holy Spirit brought unity in diversity to the global church for God's mission in the world.

This is what we celebrate today with Christians around the world. The Holy Spirit sets the direction and the mission of the church – a church gathered and led by the Spirit of truth. Jesus says that if we love him and keep his commandments of loving God and our neighbor, we will know unity in the Holy Spirit who abides with us. Jesus summarized the law and the prophets into two things, loving God and loving neighbor. The church is to be an example, not of mirroring the divided spirit of the world, but of the unity of God's love for many nations in a broken world.

Imagine the agitation and fear of Philip and the disciples. Jesus had told them he would be leaving them. Philip's agitation is urgent and real. He wants to see and know the mystery of God before Jesus leaves him. Jesus said to Philip, *"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* In Jesus, we see the hidden mystery of God revealed. This is the starting point of Luther's "theology of the cross." In Jesus, we meet the one who was crucified, revealing God's love.

To help his followers Jesus said, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."* Jesus was beginning the transition of leadership from his hands into the hands of his church. Led by the Holy Spirit, we are the hands and voices of Jesus in this world. This is what churches keep rediscovering: mission only happens when we stay close to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is not simply a commemoration, a remembrance of something God did two thousand years ago; Pentecost is a celebration of the new thing the Holy Spirit is continually doing in the church. God is continually re-gathering the church as a new creation.

Jesus makes it clear: for the church to speak about God's deeds of power, about the truth of God, it must rely upon the Spirit of truth whom Jesus sends. Jesus warns the church that it cannot receive the Spirit of truth from the world, because the world cannot see or know the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of truth abides not in the world, but only in and with the church. Jesus' words caution us lest we think we can speak about God's deeds of power without the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' distinction between the church and the world is crucial for us to see, because we have often conflated the church and the world. We talk about a "culture of Christianity" as if the world is simply an extension of the church and Christ's body. Jesus made a distinction between the church and the world for a reason: the world does not know Jesus and the Spirit of truth. The world is divided, broken and selfish; the world is sinful. It is the world that is still in need of the

love, compassion and mercy of God. The world continues to be divided by nationalistic and commercial forces seeking to divide and conquer human hearts. Our world continues to be divided by different spirits of racism and discrimination of those who seem different. The world continues to be afraid of those it perceives as the Other.

At Pentecost, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church becomes a light shining in the darkness of the world. The church becomes a community in unity with difference. Truth is not black and white. Truth is complex, and in our world of sound bites and predigested news reporting, we rarely seek to see the complexity of truth. Jesus sends the Spirit of truth to his church because it must speak his truth to the world.

The word “truth,” in Greek, means reality as opposed to illusion. The truth that the Holy Spirit reveals is God’s reality about human community. The church is to become a model of God’s reality of love in a badly, and at times violently, divided world. We are not called as the church to model the world’s divisions and injustices. The church is gathered to reflect the reality and truth of God’s vision, that in Christ all nations share the gifts of their diversity in God’s mission of love.

It is also appropriate that we celebrate Senior Sunday on Pentecost today with Alice and her family. Alice, may God bless you in your new life chapter as you go to university, where you will make new discoveries about yourself, and also discover a much more diverse and complex world than you have experienced so far. You will have challenges and questions, and I encourage you to remember your prayer life. Remember Jesus’ invitation, “*If in my name you ask me anything, I will do it.*” Prayer in Jesus’ name keeps our prayers honest, because we are seeking solutions and guidance *from him*. I also encourage you to find a church. At church you will also be encouraged to hear others from very different backgrounds speak about God’s power in their lives. As you leave this place, the Holy Spirit abides with you and in you wherever your life takes you.

The beauty of Pentecost and Christ’s church is that the Holy Spirit abides in the church, and we hear the Spirit speaking in voices from many different backgrounds, nations and cultures.

Pentecost teaches us, if we dare to listen, if we dare to be real, that all people have a story to tell about God’s mighty deeds. All people. If we learn nothing else from Pentecost, it is that God speaks through every person who calls upon the name of Jesus.

Abide with Jesus and the Holy Spirit will abide with you. Trust that your hands and voices will do greater works because the Spirit of truth abides with you.

He abides with you so that you can abide with others. Amen.