

Today is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday immediately following the Day of Pentecost when we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is the Sunday when we try to explain the church's doctrine of the Trinity – the mysterious relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- in words that are easily understood, which is a feat that has seldom been accomplished in centuries of sermons and expositions. This is the Sunday when preachers usually fall back on esoteric learning and bizarre examples in an attempt to explain the Trinity – the three-in-one God. And this year I was really looking forward to the sermon time. As I prepared for the Feast of Pentecost last week, much of my Trinity Sunday sermon was already in the hopper, as they say, and it promised to be a unique intellectual examination of the Trinity.

But then this past week took a turn that was unexpected, unplanned, and for which I was unprepared. I always remind people that prayer is a powerful force and, because we can never be exactly sure how God will answer our prayer, we need to be careful what we pray for. We've shared stories about prayer being answered in ways that only make sense when we look back at our life. And so last week, on Pentecost, we could have had a nice celebration at church, remembering the whimsical coming of the Holy Spirit on those gathered to observe an ancient Jewish festival. We could have simply had our colorful balloons, that Fr. Tom likes so much, and enjoyed our cake to celebrate the birthday of the Church. We could have just done some 'churchy' stuff and gone home, but nooooooooooooo... we had to go and invoke the Holy Spirit. We just had to go and pray ♪ *Come, Holy Spirit, Come!* ♪ We weren't all that careful about what we prayed for, and in that prayer we opened the door for the Holy Spirit to blow wildly through our lives.

Many of you know the beginning of this story. The morning after Pentecost, I awakened to police cars and shocked neighbors, and a beautiful church building with large blue lettering painted across its wall. I stopped and, with tear-filled eyes, prayed silently for the person who left that message of despair. The rest of the day, amidst the busyness of a Monday, was spent in prayerful thought on how to respond. Sometimes the Spirit blows in one sudden *whoosh* of insight and sometimes the Spirit comes in little events, in sparks of ideas, in thoughts that come to us from nowhere or from the lips of those around us. By the end of the day, the Spirit-inspired answer was clear and what had formerly been the wall of Grace Episcopal Church now became 'God's Billboard,' as we shared the message "God loves you with no exceptions" with a hurting world. And if I was unprepared to awaken to a defaced church, I was really not prepared for the response that followed. Within hours people were stopping to take photos of the church or driving by while giving 'thumbs up' or just standing on the sidewalk weeping at the message, and thousands of people from all over the country were responding by phone, email, and posts on Facebook. Thousands of people heard and rejoiced in the message that "God loves you" ... that "God loves ME" ... with no exceptions.

As I contemplate this journey upon which the Spirit has launched us, I realize that much of the excitement is about language. Last week, on Pentecost, we talked about how our words, even

when we think we are speaking the same language, are so ineffective in actually communicating with each other. And our language about God seems to be just as ineffective. We struggle to explain our belief in God and how we see God working in the world, and often our words don't make sense to those around us. We create doctrines and creeds – we will all say the Nicene Creed in just a short while – in our attempt to explain what we believe, but the reality is those words often just flatten our beliefs. In our clumsy attempts at using language, God is often described in cold terms, unchanging and unfeeling, remote and disconnected, which makes it so hard for people to hear how God is actively involved in the unfolding of our lives right here and now. And so we seek a language that shows the true nature of God.

As I've shared with you in the past, our name says a lot about who we are. For God this also says a lot, for in the Bible God's Name is a *verb*! (יהוה) And as you know, a verb means action! God's Name says not so much about who God IS as what God DOES. And what God does in the world is to create – God takes the old and creates the new; takes the wounded and heals; takes the broken and makes them whole. And it seems the message “God loves you with no exceptions” breaks through any language barrier and declares the deep truth of God's action in the world and in each of our lives. This is God's language of love and hope and grace and peace. This is the language that seems to be understood by everyone – the language inspired of the Spirit.

But just because the Spirit inspires us to a new and all-embracing language doesn't mean we will be comfortable with it. Spray-painting “God loves you...” on the side of our beautiful church building certainly is not a comfortable thing to do. And even though Jesus said that he would send us a ‘comforter,’ the Holy Spirit, to help us, the actions of that comforter are often not so comfortable. But we tend to think of comfort in terms of a plush, familiar, reclining chair, when what Jesus meant was he would send one who would journey beside us to embolden our actions in the world. And bold actions are often not so ‘comfy.’ Yet comfy or not, the Spirit, the comforter, is the one in whom we trust to give us dreams of what the world could be like, and then to guide and empower our bold actions in the world to make a new reality.

Dreams of how the world could be – I believe everyone has such a dream. Often we spend much of our life discovering our own dream and learning how to articulate it. Our Grace Church family also has a dream, though we often mask it by using dull terms like ‘mission statement.’ And sometimes, when we are really fortunate, there is a wonderful confluence when those two dreams converge. I truly believe that we now stand at such a confluence and I want to share that dream, a dream that I believe declares how the Spirit is moving among us, which came to me this week in the wise words of Bishop Steven Charleston, who said *“I want to be a safe space for every person I meet. I want to open my heart to receive, welcome, and honor every person I encounter. Without conditions. Without needing for them to change themselves, hide themselves, explain themselves. I will be a life without borders, a living space free from fear. I will be [a] place of peace.”* In those words I hear a calling of the Spirit for our community. I hear our dream. But a dream without action remains just that – a dream. And so I ask: What will our action be?

I began by saying that many of us know the beginning of this story, but nobody knows the ending yet. I believe that not even God knows the ending. In all of the times that God touches our life, we have a choice of how to respond. God will never force anyone, but only invites each of us to a fuller life in love. Likewise, in those times that the Holy Spirit blows wildly through our life, with the 'comforter' rocking our comfortable world, we have a choice on how to respond. We can recoil, drawing back into ourselves, or we can allow our lives to be opened wider and wider. We can choose to recline comfortably on our soft pew cushions, but only long enough to rest and refresh ourselves in the presence of God and each other. We can relish singing our favorite hymns, but can we also embrace a new and a different, language that will touch others around us? We can hang on to the old and comfortable, but can we also celebrate the new and uncomfortable? With each passing day, the Spirit urges us to wake up to the world around us, to embrace whatever language is necessary to proclaim the Good News to those in our community and in the wider world who are hungering to hear the Good News of God. If we truly listen to the guiding of the Spirit, we can't help but respond.

The north side of Grace Church is due to be repainted over the summer. The question for us, the challenge to you and me, is how will we make sure that when that happens, that our message of hope will remain? When that fresh coat of paint has dried, will people still look at this building and know that God loves them with no exceptions? Will they look at the faces, and into the eyes, of each of us here to day and see the truth that God loves them? What will we, as God's community in this place, do to make sure that all who are hurting and lost in this world will forever hear the Good News of God proclaimed boldly from this place? The world is waiting to hear our answer.