

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**May 31, 2020, Pentecost Sunday**

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b Call to Worship, John 14:8-17, 25-27, Acts 2:1-21

### **“KNOWING” THE HOLY SPIRIT ON PENTECOST**

This week I was writing to a friend and said, “In this season of change, change just keeps happening.” From conversations with you, I know I’m not the only one who thinks change is tiring; it asks things of us on known levels, and a lot of emotional subterranean levels. Change can be exciting, but constant change and adaptation in this new normal is an undercurrent in our lives that can’t be ignored.

I was reminded of a workshop on Change I took years ago at Ghost Ranch. On the first day our instructor asked us to change one thing in our morning routine the next day. Well this is easy I thought the next morning, I’ll wash my face before I put the shampoo on my hair, instead of the other way around. Let me just say it wasn’t easy, it was like the grinding of gears, to reroute 40 plus years of habit, and use the face soap before the shampoo.

When the instructor started that morning’s teaching with the words: “Change is difficult isn’t it?” we were all able to agree. Many of us were surprised by how hard one tiny change had been in our morning routing.

This week as I spent time with the story of Pentecost and the change that it brought to the disciples and to the world, I was reminded of a story I told you on Pentecost four years ago. The Rev. Dr. Michael Jinkins, who is the retired President of our Presbyterian Seminary in Louisville, KY wrote about a big change that happened in his life. He wrote:

“This year, a very interesting event occurred in my life. I now know something I never knew before. I now "know" red and green, and a lot of other colors and hues that depend upon these essential colors.

I did not acquire this new knowledge because I finally took time to buy a box of crayons or read up on the difference between these colors. I had "known about" red and green since I was a child. And I now "know" red and green because this Christmas my wife, Debbie, bought me a pair of spectacles that correct for the misshapen innards of my eyes which have caused me to be red/green spectrum color blind my entire life...

...Most reds, most greens, I just couldn't detect. I didn't know them. I adapted myself to my lack of knowledge, sometimes more successfully than others.

Color blindness isn't fatal, of course, unless you mistake a red light for a green one...but it does represent a real loss. But, now, thanks to medical science, technology and Debbie, I know red and green. Which means I know a lot of other things, too.

The first time I wore these glasses on a bright, sunny, spring day...I was driving and the strangest thing happened. I pulled up to the traffic light...and the light was green. I mean the light actually looked green to me. I knew it as green, and I'd never before known a green light. When I was a little boy, in fact, I thought the phrase "green light" was some sort of weird adult idiom, a figure of speech. The lights looked white to me, a pretty common experience among color-blind people. But, this time, and for the very first time in my life, the light was green.

And, "wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles," when I turned the corner...something else really strange happened. I saw a redbud tree in full bloom, and the darned thing was purple - fuchsia to be more exact - with outrageously pink highlights! I still remember the first time I told someone I couldn't understand why a blue tree was called a "redbud tree." Now I knew. It isn't blue. In a sense, I was seeing a redbud tree for the very first time. I now knew something I had never known before.”

This morning I want to offer you a way of “knowing” God that may be familiar to you, or it may be a new way of “knowing something you’ve never known before.” I’d like to think of this “knowing” as something like the new pair of glasses that Michael Jinkins received from his wife.

When each Pentecost Sunday comes around, I am reminded of how many people have talked to me about the Holy Spirit through the years of my ministry.

A vast majority of them have said something along the lines of “I just don’t get the Holy Spirit.” Then they’ve often said: “I understand God as Father, Parent, Creator, Mother,

I understand Jesus as my Savior, the Son of God, but I just don’t get the Holy Spirit.”

And what I have said to them each time I’ve had that conversation, is what I want to say to you on this Pentecost Sunday: I think you already know the Holy Spirit of God, but you may not think of your experiences with those words.

Like the glasses that Michael Jinkins put on, that helped him “know” green and red, what I want to offer today are some new glasses for you to try on, that may help you look at some of your experiences of God in a new way, and “know” God in a new way. Because I do believe that you have all had experiences of God’s Holy Spirit, but may not have labelled those experiences that way.

In the last church I served, the manse was next door to a family with five daughters. One day as I was coming home from a walk, 4-year old Savannah yelled to me from the front porch: “Guess what I know?” When I asked her what she knew, she jumped up and down with joy and shouted: “The Holy Spirit lives in my heart!”

Someone had given her a new pair of glasses!

This morning I want to offer those same glasses to you: “The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.”

As followers of Jesus, we have received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul writes: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

And in 2 Corinthians 6:16 he writes: “For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

I believe you already know the Holy Spirit. If you’ve ever told someone that what just happened to you felt like a God moment, that’s the Holy Spirit. Or you’ve said to someone, “I know this was so much more than a coincidence,” that’s God’s Holy Spirit acting in your life.

**You know the Holy Spirit.**

If you have ever been out along the river, or beside a lake or the ocean and been overwhelmed by the beauty of the creation around you,  
or you’ve stood under a night sky and felt God there,  
or you’ve been stopped by the incredible colors in a sunrise or sunset and felt God’s presence,  
that is the Holy Spirit, connecting you to your God. **You know the Holy Spirit.**

Or if you have had the experience of being critically ill, or you’ve been in an accident, or someone in your family is going through an awful time, or you or someone you love is waiting for their Covid19 test results, and you can somehow feel the strength of people praying for you, or you can feel God’s love around you even though it is such a scary time, you are experiencing the comforting power of God’s Holy Spirit. **You know the Holy Spirit.**

Have you ever had the experience of feeling like you really needed to call someone or see someone, and you call them or stop by (or at least you did in the old days), and they can't get over it because they really needed a friend right then? That is the Holy Spirit nudging you to help share God's love with someone who needed it, right then! **You know the Holy Spirit.**

Through the years I've heard stories from people who felt the presence of God with them in a time of great fear, or great tragedy, or abuse, or on the battlefield, or when their life or the life of someone they loved was threatened. That is the Holy Spirit reminding us that God is with us always. God's Spirit lives within us and will not ever leave us alone. **You know the Holy Spirit.**

Sometimes we sense the Holy Spirit in times of great joy. Those tears you shed at the birth of your child or grandchild, or on your wedding day when you said "I do," or when you've looked into the face of a friend and you are so thankful to God for them, that is the Holy Spirit connecting you to the gifts in your life, and showing you the joy of God's love for you. **You know the Holy Spirit.**

And there are times in the journey of faith when you may have experienced the Holy Spirit in Sunday worship or your own times of quiet time with God. When you are singing a hymn on a Sunday, or in your car, and it's as though you are hearing and singing the words for the first time, because they help you say exactly what you've been longing to say to God;

Or you are reading the Bible, or hearing it read, and it feels like it was written for you specifically in that moment;

Or there's a story or verse you've heard so many times, and then in a moment it's as though you are hearing it for the very first time. That is the Holy Spirit moving and breathing in your life.

**You know the Holy Spirit.**

In Paul's words: "You are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you."

God is saying to each one of you on this Pentecost Sunday, "I will live in you, and walk among you and I will be your God, and you will be my people."

The same Holy Spirit of God who we see throughout the Bible lives in our hearts:

The Spirit of God, who in the very first verses of Genesis breathed over the chaotic waters of creation,

is breathing over each of us and all of us, in this chaotic season of change upon change with Covid19.

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

The Holy Spirit, who guided King David as he danced his joy and worship before God, and is moving and breathing through all the changed ways God's people are worshiping.

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

The Holy Spirit, who moved through Elijah's vision of valley of dry bones being knitted together joint by joint, until breath once again entered God's people,

will continue to knit us and our world together, even and especially during this world pandemic; God will breathe life into our spirits,

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

The Holy Spirit who appeared like a dove above Jesus as he came up out of the waters of Baptism in the Jordan River,

comes into our hearts at our own baptisms and each time we remember that we are baptized.

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart every day.**

The Holy Spirit, who Jesus promised to his disciples as a Comforter and Healer,  
will continue to comfort and heal the children of God, and you and me,  
even and especially in this heartbreaking season of loss and change,

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

The Holy Spirit who came as a mighty rushing wind and tongues of flame on that first Pentecost,  
continues to come to our generation in this season of change,  
calling us to invite others to follow Jesus,

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

The Holy Spirit who guided Paul, and Peter, and Priscilla and Aquila and the apostles on their  
missionary journeys to build the church of Jesus Christ,  
calls us to continue building up the church of Jesus Christ,  
even as we experience and create the church in new and changed ways.

**The Holy Spirit of God lives in your heart.**

In Paul's words: "You are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you."

Or in 4-year old Savannah's words: "The Holy Spirit lives in your heart"

God is saying to each one of you on this Pentecost Sunday,

"I will live in you, and walk among you and I will be your God, and you will be my people."

This is our Good News, put on your glasses and see: you "know" the Holy Spirit of God!