

Today is the celebration of the third great Christian Day. Today we remember that Christmas means God is with us, Easter means God that God is for us, and Pentecost means that God is in us.

Pentecost is the promise of the power and presence of God in our lives. How shall we talk about that this morning? Well, let's reflect for a few moments about challenges.

- The Holy Spirit was first given at a time of challenge. Jesus had ascended and the disciples were waiting and lonely. It was a challenging time.
- The Holy Spirit, Paul said, is with us in those moments when we cannot speak for ourselves or pray for ourselves. Then the Holy Spirit speaks for us and even groans and sighs for us. Those are challenging times.
- The Holy Spirit was in both Peter's life and in Paul's life to move them to greater things for God. They would have settled for spreading the Gospel to Jerusalem and Judea. But the Holy Spirit came at that time and opened their eyes and transformed their hearts so that the Gospel was spread to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

These were challenging times. In fact, the Holy Spirit seems to be most visible in those days when we do not know where to go or what to do. So let's look at some challenging times this morning, and how the Holy Spirit works.

Allow me to share two challenges from my life this week. They were not huge challenges, but they may help us to get on the same page this morning.

1. Challenge #1: My only daughter was in the market to buy a car this week... and bought one. Thank you, Dick Guinness! This was a technical challenge. [We will come back to that word - technical.]

This car buying challenge had to do with mechanical things, practical things; it was a technical challenge.

My relationship with Emily has not changed because of this challenge. We already had everything we needed to meet this challenge. We just needed to know what type of car, what price, what condition the car was in. We needed some technical skill to make it happen. That was one challenge.

2. Challenge #2: My youngest son took his behind the wheel test... and passed.

This was an adaptive challenge for me. [Again, we will come back to that word: adaptive.]

Since Sam is the 4th of four children who have traveled down this road of acquiring a driver's license, I understand that this will be a significant change in my life. It means that I need to view this son differently now because something very substantial has passed under the bridge of life.

A driver's license may appear to be simply a piece of paper, but it has power to change relationships. We have now entered into a new territory with new freedoms for the teenager and fears for the adult. It is an adaptive challenge to my life.

Those two phrases – adaptive challenge and technical challenge – come from a book by Ron Heifetz called “Leadership on the Line.”

On this Pentecost Sunday I invite us to consider how the Holy Spirit leads us through the challenges of life – especially the adaptive challenges of life.

These are the challenges where God is asking us to grow, like God asked Paul and Peter to grow. These are the challenges where we often say, “We have never been here before. These are the difficult challenges of life – where we really need the power and the presence of God.

What are the adaptive challenges which we face in this life. Let me give us three examples. The first one has to do with teenagers. Teenagers are graduating this week and next week. Teenagers are getting driver's licenses. Teenagers are making significant decisions.

The first adaptive challenge is concerning teenagers, and it has to do with this word:

1. **Hurts.** You and I need to be aware that in our world many teenagers are hurting.

A professor at Fuller Seminary did a Sabbatical study a couple of years ago. For several months this professor spent his time getting as close to teenagers as he could:

- he served as a substitute high school teacher,
- he volunteered to serve at as many youth events as he could,
- he spent as much time listening to their stories as he could.

He wrote a book about what he found out about the teenagers he got to know in CA. This is the name of that book: Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers.

The author – Chap Clark – says:

The biggest theme that emerged out of my study is that institutions that were originally designed for teens have dramatically changed. Now instead of being about caring for kids or what's best for kids, they're often more about what's best for adults and keeping kids busy. I describe this as "systemic abandonment of the young" by the adults.

Chap Clark also says:

In the middle of the twentieth century, youth sports was about new and fun experiences, appreciating the joy of play, learning to work together for a common goal, and friendly competition. But have you been to a baseball game for eight year-olds lately? It's no longer about Johnny or Susie. It's more about how Johnny's step-dad feels about how Johnny's played, and whether or not Susie's coach is satisfied with the final score.

Finally, the author says:

By the time a young person hits mid-adolescence, at roughly the age of 14, she becomes aware of the effects of this lifelong abandonment of adults. The safety and protection she wants from adults just isn't there.

Now, CA is not ND or MN. And the neighborhood this man studied might be very different from our neighborhood. But, there is truth to what he says... Some of us need to change how we love our teenagers, and our soon to be teenagers.

On this Pentecost Sunday I want to remind us that the Holy Spirit is here to guide us in caring for our children and our teenagers. The Holy Spirit is not just a rushing wind 2,000 years ago that we kind of remember today.

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God and the power of God for the challenges of life. The Bible says, *“Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”* [2 Timothy 1:14]

A second adaptive change has to do with this word:

2. **Endings**. This is Memorial Day weekend, and I want to say something that is on my heart.
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For the years of my childhood we spent Memorial Weekend going to Riceford Cemetery, North Prairie Cemetery, and the Rushford Lutheran Church Cemetery. These cemeteries were close together, and were the places where my relatives were buried.

It has now been years since I have been to those cemeteries. I miss the days when we went and placed flowers and spent a few moments remembering in those places. But today my work and my geographical distance keep me from participating in that tradition.

Many of us no longer have a family cemetery. I know that is true for many in this sanctuary as well as for me. And it makes endings more difficult when we have lost that anchor.

I was visiting with LaDonne Vik’s mom, Pat, after her husband died on Friday morning. She said, “It is hard.” I knew what she was talking about, but I asked her to tell me so she could use the words.

She told me that endings are so hard. 53 years of life together is so hard to see coming to an end. She spoke truly. This is Memorial Day weekend; these things are on our minds. How do we handle endings?

Jesus said he would send us another... and then the Bible uses a word that means: Comforter – Encourager – Counselor – Helper – Friend. [John 14:16]

The Holy Spirit is the power and presence of God for the challenges of life. The Bible says, *“If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is... Set your minds on things that are above... When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”* [Colossians 3:1-4]

It is the Holy Spirit who gives power to adapt so that we are not just of the earth, but also of heaven. The Spirit lifts our thoughts to include the promises of Jesus.

A third adaptive change has to do with this word:

3. **Helplessness**. *“I am going to treatment.”*

I was walking through one of those long apartment hallways earlier this week. As I passed a door an inebriated woman opened the door and walked out, followed by a second woman, whom I soon found out was her friend; a true friend.

As the inebriated woman looked at me she asked, “Do you know where I am going?” I had to truthfully answer her. “No, I do not know where you are going.”

Her friend then put her arm around the woman – the woman who did not know where she was going. The friend said, “You remember where we are going. You need help, and I can bring you to a place where you can be helped. We are going to treatment.”

The woman who did not know where she was going started crying. She said to me, “I called my Mom last night. I told her I loved her.”

Then the woman who did not know where she was going said to me, "I am going to treatment. There is help for me." Then she smiled. And I smiled with her. And I told her, "There is help for you."

There is Help for you and me this day as well. There is a Friend who will take us directly to that Help. The Bible says, "*The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. He will remind you of all the things I have told you.*" [John 14:26 The Message]

It is the Holy Spirit who brings us into the very presence of God, so that God can treat our sins, our despair, our emptiness, our failures. There is Help for us.

A children's catechism class was learning the Apostles Creed. Each child had been assigned a sentence to repeat.

- The first one said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."
- The second child said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son..."
- When he had completed his sentence, there was an embarrassing silence. Finally, one child piped up, "Teacher, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn't here."

Let us pray...