

“God with Us”
Acts 2:1-2, John 3:6-8, Romans 8:22-23, Matthew 11:28-30, 1 John 4:19
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Grandma came into the room where her grandson, Joey, was in his playpen crying. When Joey saw his grandmother, he reached out his arms and cried all the louder, “Out, Gamma, out!” Grandma naturally reached down to Joey, but as she did, Joey’s mother arrived to say, “No, Mom, Joey is being punished. He has to stay in his playpen.” Grandma felt at a loss to know what to do. She did not want to overrule her daughter’s efforts to discipline her son. Yet Joey’s tears and uplifted arms tugged at her heart. Suddenly, Grandma had an idea. If she could not take Joey out of the playpen, there was no rule against climbing in there herself so she could be with her grandson. And that is just what she did — to Joey’s instant delight, and to Joey’s mother’s grudging smile. Grandma found a way to be with Joey as Joey learned unloving ways have consequences. Grandma sat with Joey helping him grow in love.

Today is Pentecost Sunday a time to celebrate God being with us, in us, and around us through the mysterious Holy Spirit who is guiding us to the most excellent ways of love. St. Basil said: “Through the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, led back to the Kingdom of heaven and adopted as children, given confidence to call God “Parent” and to share in Christ’s grace, called children of light and given a share in eternal glory.”

Dennis Bratcher wrote: “Pentecost Sunday is a day to celebrate hope, a hope evoked by the knowledge that God through God’s Holy Spirit is at work among God’s people. Pentecost is a celebration of newness, of recreation, of renewal of purpose, mission and calling as God’s people. Pentecost is a celebration of God’s ongoing work in the world. Yet, it is also a recognition that God’s work is done through God’s people as God pours out God’s presence upon us.”

God created a good world. Every person has failed to receive love and love all people, love self, and love God. Indifference, fear, and hate are all opposites of love. Jesus said if you have ever felt hate for anyone, you have committed murder. Our corporate lack of love makes life difficult and at times miserable. We are like the child in the playpen, groaning, crying, pleading for God to save us. The mother is like God the Creator. We need to be taught to end our unloving ways, to not fear, to not hate, to not be silent when rights are taken away, to not be indifferent when people are oppressed, hungry, and homeless. We need to be taught how to love. Our lack of love has consequences, although there is often not a direct connection between our sin and the suffering we endure. Conversely, our blessings rarely come from our lifestyle. Every blessing is a free unearned gift given by the grace of God. We are not able to understand suffering and our fallen world this side of heaven. Just as we cannot comprehend the forgiving, healing, and sustaining energy of God’s grace. Henry Emerson Fosdick said: “I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.”

Jesus is like the grandma who climbed into the playpen to be with her grandson. Jesus came to earth to be with us, to help us carry our burdens. At times, Jesus carries us. Jesus wipes away our tears. Jesus shows us how to love and helps us grow in love.

The Holy Spirit is also like the grandma who climbs into our world and into our heart, mind, and soul. The Holy Spirit does an abundance of loving work in each person. At times, the Holy Spirit is the voice in our mind, or the feeling in our heart, that warns us of our unloving ways. Other times, the Holy Spirit is the forgiving, cleansing, purifying force that chases away negative thoughts, away feelings of guilt, away that bullying voice within you that beats you up. The Holy Spirit assures you that you are loved, that you belong to God’s family, that you are talented and gifted, that your life has eternal goodness, meaning, and purpose.

At the very beginning, Genesis describes how the wind of the Holy Spirit brought about all of creation. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as God’s breath—as the creative, moving, dynamic, divine, life-giving, loving, joyful, wind which blew across the dark void of chaos creating a good world.

One chapter later in Genesis we have the story of the creation of humankind from the dust of the ground. God breathed into humanity the breath of life, the Holy Spirit, and humans became living beings.

Jesus expands on this with another birth story involving the wind of the Holy Spirit in his conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus said **John 3:6-8 “The Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven. So do not be surprised at my statement that you must be born again. Just as you can hear the wind but cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Holy Spirit.”**

All of us were born and have physical life by the breath of the Holy Spirit. All of us at times have failed to love, creating misery. We are continually born again by the Holy Spirit. We celebrate this invisible truth with the visible sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Holy Spirit continually graciously redeems us. The Holy Spirit continually washing away our unloving ways giving us infinite opportunities to grow in love. The Holy Spirit nourishes us with peace, hope, joy, and love so we can live abundantly.

The apostle Paul tells of another birth. **Romans 8:22-23 “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”** Life is hard. Life is labor. Every groan, pain, and tear will be eclipsed by the joy of abundant life in the fully redeemed kingdom of God. The breath of the Holy Spirit is like the OBGYN who helps an expectant mom breathe through the labor of birth yielding joyful life.

The apostle Paul wrote: **“the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”** Weakness includes our pain, struggles, and burdens; our uncertainty, confusion, and doubt; our frustration that we don’t always do the good we want to do. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. Helps is a very timid translation of the Greek. The word we translate helps comes from three Greek words. The first means “along with,” and “together with.” The second means “for” and “in the place of.” The third means “to take hold of,” “remove,” “bear,” and to carry. All together the word refers to the Holy Spirit coming alongside us to take most of our heavy load and help us bear it. Jesus described it as being united, yoked together, with God. Jesus said: **Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly and the burden I give you is light.”**

The prophet Ezekiel describes how calamities sometimes leave us dry, brittle, and lifeless, like a pile of dry bones. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For when we are distraught, aching, totally spent, weary, feeling like a heap of dry bones. The Holy Spirit never leaves us. The Holy Spirit breathes life into us connecting bone to bone, rejuvenating the flesh, revitalizing us, filling our minds with pure grand visions, our heart with extravagant love and soul with exuberant joy. We are created by the Holy Spirit and continually given life.

The Holy Spirit is described as fire. Fire brings light, warmth, and purity. Before electricity, fire was the primary source of light at night. When the fire of the Holy Spirit fell upon those gathered on Pentecost, they experienced spiritual illumination. Love in all forms was illumined and made visible. At the moment of Pentecost each person fully understood everyone else. Everyone was sharing their experiences of God’s grace. Everyone fully perceived love by the illuminating fire of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit illumined Peter filled him with fire to preach causing thousands to be enlightened and baptized.

Jesus said, “I am the light.” Jesus gave numerous illustrations of how God enlightens the world and our hearts. Richard Hauser asks, “Do we adequately acknowledge the Spirit’s role in the good actions we perform every day, or do we attribute them only to our own initiative and hard work? The scripture model insists that if the action was good, the Spirit was present from the beginning to the end.” The Holy Spirit illumines and enlightens everyone and everything. The Holy Spirit is the fire that sets ablaze love. The Holy Spirit is a mystery for the Spirit works through the physical world, events, and people. So, it is easy to mistake the Spirit’s work for our own work, or that of other people or of nature or science or society. John declares: **1 John 4:19 “We love because God first loved us.”** Every instance of love is a gracious gift sparked by the Holy Spirit.

The fire of the Holy Spirit is able to enlighten us no matter if our tongue is shorthand or text message, thinker or doer, introvert or extrovert, homemaker or executive, politician or laborer, Christian or Muslim. No matter where you are on the spiritual wheel, Meyers-Briggs, or Enneagram, regardless of which love language you speak the Holy Spirit enlightens us so we can understand one another, love one another, and love the world, even love our enemies bringing enlightenment to the world. Love is a universal language. The enlightening fire of the Holy Spirit embraces all in warmth. The Holy Spirit is sometimes described as a warming of one’s heart. Without God, life is cold. One feels unloved, uncomfortable, and unwanted. The fire of the Holy Spirit brings warmth, love, comfort and belonging. Sort of like a dancing campfire on a cold night.

Fire brings purity. Fire is used to purge out impurities in metal manufacturing. The fire of the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our sin and refines us into pure goodness.

The Holy Spirit is peace. Repeatedly Jesus appeared to the disciples in crisis situations and gave them peace. In the midst of loss and rapid change, the Holy Spirit chases away our anxiety with peace. The Holy Spirit comforts us until we have the courage to love extravagantly.

When we welcome the peace, breath, wind, fire, and love of the Holy Spirit and reach out our arms to God from the mess of our unloving ways groaning and crying, “out God out,” then God fills us with the Holy Spirit. God climbs into our life, helps us carry our burdens, fills us with abundant life and teaches us how to love everyone. Then we are able to be peace, breath, wind, fire, and love bearers. We are able to communicate in the universal language of God’s love, sharing stories of God’s wonderful redeeming grace. We become like Peter so ablaze with the Holy Spirit that others open their hearts and joyfully receive the Holy Spirit. God fills us with the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness, to enable love, until we are lifted up to heaven. Happy Pentecost. Amen.