The Way to the Father
John 14:8-17 (25-27)
Pentecost, Year C June 8, 2025
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Good evening, friends. How nice to see members of all three churches here at Antioch to celebrate Pentecost together on a Saturday evening! As I once read, our gathering reminds us that worship isn't a solo act; it's a chorus. We worship most fully when we do it together: lifting different voices, sharing each other's burdens, holding space for both sorrow and celebration. This evening reminds us how powerful it is to come together—across our three congregations—to praise one God with one heart.

As you probably know, Acts 2 records the events of Pentecost. This is one of three pilgrimage festivals (Passover and Tabernacles being the other two), which require Jewish males to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, Jewish people from around the world had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, known in Hebrew as Shavuot (*shuh voo' owt*). This holy day recalled the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. It also commemorates the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and marks the end of the seven-week period between Passover and the harvest.9 a.m., the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples as a "rush of a violent wind" and "tongues as of fire" (2:2-3). They began to speak in languages that they had never studied, but were well-known to people in the crowd. Note that this is different from the speaking in other tongues (*glossolalia*), a private prayer language that Paul refers to. This amazing event enabled all those present to hear the good news of "God's deeds of power" in their own language (2:11). Following this outpouring of the Spirit, Peter addressed the crowd, prompting three thousand people to seek baptism (2:41).

That's the familiar story of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit as Luke tells it in Acts. But the Gospel of John provides another account of this important event. Whereas in Acts, the Spirit comes fifty (*pente*) days after Easter, in John, Jesus himself breathes the Spirit upon the disciples when he appeared to them on Easter evening (John 20:22). We know it was Jesus himself who gave the Spirit, because we are told that "he showed them his hands and his side" (20:20). These wounds, which were scars by which the disciples could identify Jesus, prompted them to rejoice. Moreover, in the verses recounting Jesus first appearance (20:19-23), we find the words, "peace be with you." not once but twice (20:19; 21). Jesus also told them to forgive sins. At first glance, that command may not seem to fit with the rest of this brief account. Yet, we know Jesus has told his

followers to love one another as he has loved them, which certainly implies that they are to forgive one another. In addition, when we think about Jesus' words, it becomes clear that when sins are forgiven the body of believers can remain at peace and as one. That unity is very important, since Jesus is sending them out, just as the Father has sent him. If church members are fighting among themselves, how can the love and good fruit that Jesus calls us to bear even be seen?

Having considered these two different reports of the coming of the Holy Spirit, we can finally turn to today's reading from John 14:8-17 and 14:25-27, the second part of which was in the Gospel lectionary reading on May 25th.

Today's Gospel lesson begins in John 14:8-14 with a request by Philip, followed by a lengthy response from Jesus. "Hey, Jesus." Philip inquires, "if you show us the Father, that will be enough for us." Really, Philip? Have you not been listening to Jesus? In the plain English of Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, Jesus said:

> You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act (John 14:9-10).

Jesus asks if Philip doesn't believe that he and the Father are one. Not long before this conversation, Jesus had bluntly said, "The Father and I are one" (10:30). Jesus was telling Philip that he and the Father share nature and purpose, though they are distinct persons, as later Trinitarian theology will teach us.

We can understand Jesus' astonishment. He's been with the disciples for about three years now, but Philip still does not yet get the connection between the Son and Father. Before we assume Philip is not the sharpest crayon in the box, let's remember that his use of the word "we" would indicate that he's speaking not only for himself but for all the disciples as well. Jesus tells them he is the way to the Father. Moreover, this oneness between the Father and Son is a serious sticking point for the religious leaders. They consider it blasphemy for Jesus to say that he is equal to God. Perhaps because he is a Jew, Philip is having a hard time with a paradigm shift that would allow him to see the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

Jesus then says, okay, if you don't believe my words, then believe my

works. The disciples have certainly heard Jesus' teachings and witnessed many examples of healing and demon exorcism. Surely, his actions speak as loud—or louder—than his words.

I'm with Jesus so far, but in John 14:12, he really throws me for a loop! He says, "the one who believes in me will do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." Whoa! I can't even do the works that Jesus does. How am I going to do greater works? Here, Jesus is empowering his disciples, including you and me, before he goes to the Father, but I honestly don't know what he expects of me...expects of us. Gail R. O'Day provides a key to this baffling statement in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. IX, page 746) where she writes:

> The disciples' works, which will be done *after* the events of the hour, are therefore greater because they will reveal the completed story of the Word made flesh and hence the fullness of God's love. Their works thus are not greater than Jesus' works because of anything intrinsic to the disciples themselves, but because they belong to the new...age ushered in by Jesus' hour. As such, they continue the glorification of God through Jesus that was the purpose of Jesus' own works.
>
> Second, Jesus' repeated promise in verses 13-14 that he will answer the believers' prayers makes explicit that it is Jesus who acts in and through the disciples and their works.

I must admit that Dr. O'Day's explanation make me feel better. Jesus is clearly not expecting me to do something on my own, but rather is working in and through me—and you—to show his love and to keep his commandments.

Well, just when I think I'm beginning to understand this difficult passage, Jesus says that he will do anything that we ask in his name. Anything? I think that depends on what I'm asking for. Jesus certainly does not need to provide me with a super-luxurious sports car when children abroad and at home face food insecurity every day. I know I'm just one person, but I need to keep my requests simpler. Actually, what Jesus is saying is that I need to keep my requests in line with what he himself would ask. If I do that, Jesus will say yes.

A pastor tells a story that helps us to understand how God answers prayer:

> Remember those vending machines where you could get a snack with the punch of a button? We have to be careful… it's very easy to start viewing God as our personal "Heavenly Vending Machine." You know how it goes: I say the right prayer,

or quote the right Bible verse, or make sure it's in Jesus' name. We seek a way to guarantee we are going to get what we want. Let me assure you that God answers every prayer—100% guaranteed. Here are the four answers we can get:

- Yes – that's in line with My will, so it's coming right now.
- Yes – but the timing is wrong, so you have to wait.
- Yes – it's not what I want for you, but I will let you have it to learn a lesson.

NO (that's an answer – just ask the parent of a 2-year-old).

We move now to John 14:15, where Jesus tells us that we will keep his commandments if we love him. As we have seen previously, Jesus will ask God to give us another Advocate. By using the word "another," we need to understand that Jesus is also an Advocate, or as we saw recently, a Paraclete. Remember, though, at this point he is speaking to his disciples in the Upper Room. Judas has already left the table to go and betray Jesus. Soon, the incarnate Jesus will no longer be with his friends. But he assures them that the Spirit of Truth (the Paraclete) will soon be with them. They will not be alone. I would hope that, had I been a disciple, I would by this time been able to trust Jesus. If he tells me I won't be an orphan alone in the world, I would want to believe him. And yet...this all sounds very strange to my ears. I'm not sure how I would respond. Am I willing to take Jesus at his word when he says that the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in Jesus' name, will remind me of all he has said and done? Can the Spirit really help me remember and enact all that Jesus has taught us? At that point, sitting in the Upper Room, I'm not sure what I would have thought. But I pray that I would have taken Jesus' words to heart and been able to believe what he was telling me.

Well, friends, we've been through quite a lot of Scripture today and taken on board many different ideas. As we wrap up our discussion of Pentecost, let's do one more thing. Let's compare and contrast Luke's account in Acts, which occurs well after Jesus' resurrection, with John's account, which recounts Jesus' bestowing of the Holy Spirit on his disciple on Easter evening when he first appears to them.

In today's Gospel, what we're seeing is the *promise* of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is still with us in his mortal body. The Spirit will remind us of Jesus' teachings and advocate for us. The Spirit will see that prayers offered in Jesus' name, that is, as Jesus himself would pray, are answered. The Spirit that Jesus promises will be with us forever. As Jesus promises the Spirit, so he gives us peace. What reassuring good news is that! Indeed it is, but only a few of Jesus' disciples who have gathered on Holy Thursday

actually hear this promise.

In the Acts account of Jesus' ascension, he foretells the Spirit's arrival "not many days from now" (1:5). At that time they will be baptized with the Spirit. The coming of the Spirit isn't a quiet affair, bur rather, is worthy of a Steven Spielberg production. We have a violent wind, tongues like fire, and a cacophony of voices speaking in a host of languages that people in the crowd that has gathered for the Jewish holy day of Pentecost can clearly understand. We learn later from Paul (notably in 1 Corinthians 12) that the Spirit gives individuals gifts, not for their personal use, but to build up the body of Christ. Be sure to notice that these gifts are for everyone who the Spirit chooses, both lay people and those who will eventually be known as clergy. All God's people, including you and me, have been given gifts for ministry.

So where are we—where are you—in all of this? While we cannot go back and hear Jesus speaking to us in the Upper Room, or stand with the throngs assembled around the temple on Pentecost, we can definitely be part of the story. As we mentioned last week, when a person is baptized with water, he or she also receives the promised Holy Spirit. This Spirit enables us to live as God's people, obeying commandments and living with the kind of love that Jesus taught us.

People should easily be able to see the Spirit at work in us as we relate to others. Our kindness, compassion, and willingness to help should all show forth. The gentle words we speak should disclose our love for others. And the good deeds we do should make God's grace visible to all who see us.

Today, we have seen that Jesus is the way to Father, because he and the Father are one. Yes, Jesus will die on a cross, but he won't stay nailed to that tree. Instead, God will resurrect him and cause him to ascend. On Pentecost, as God has sent Jesus, the disciples will now be ready to go forth for Jesus and do the works that he does, even greater works. The Spirit will live in them, even as the Spirit lives in you and me.

You have two challenges this week. First, use a concordance and/or the internet to find as much as you can about the Holy Spirit. What questions have your research raised? Second, do all that you can, in both word and deed, to show that the Spirit is alive and well in you.

Although Eagleman prevents us from worshiping in our churches tomorrow, the Spirit is always active. This week, let the work of the Spirit show forth in your life! Love, Nan