

It was ordination day in June of 2013. I was dressed in my white robe awaiting the moment that a stole would be placed around my neck, awaiting the bishop’s hands being laid upon me commissioning me to go forth to serve in the name of the Holy Spirit as an elder.

It is no mistake that this service is held close to the day of Pentecost, a time of celebrating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is why all ordination stoles are red as they represent this important day and season in the life of the church.

We always have the ordination service during the season of Pentecost to symbolize that we ourselves are not sent forward on our own accord, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The moment finally came, and Bishop Cho said: “Almighty God, pour upon *Jessie* the Holy Spirit for the office and work of *an elder* in Christ's holy church.”ⁱ

I will never forget that moment. It was not only special because it was the moment I became an elder, it was special because the gathered community was there to witness and bless this important moment in my life.

As I walked back to my seat with my stole on I saw the many faces of those who made it possible for me to get to that point, without them and God’s help, I never would have been ordained.

The gathered community is who we are as the people of God. It is how we continue to bear witness that God is working in the world.

We gather together for worship; we gather together for baptisms as we witness how the Holy Spirit is at work even in the life of an infant. We gather together for communion as the bread and wine are blessed and we are sent forth by the Holy Spirit.

So, on this day of Pentecost, we gather together expecting the Holy Spirit to show up in our lives.

This is how we find the disciples in our reading from Acts 2 this morning. They were waiting for the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them the Holy Spirit would come, but it had been 50 days, and nothing had happened.

I wonder if they were ready to give up. I am sure 50 days of waiting really weighs on a person.

Here we see God’s grace in their lives in this time of waiting. Some scholars suggest this gift of time helped the disciples gain strength for the task ahead.ⁱⁱ I don’t know about you, but this time has given me some time to rest when I wouldn’t have otherwise.

Scholars also believe that this time of fifty days gave the disciples an opportunity to grieve.ⁱⁱⁱ The disciples had been through a lot. They had seen Jesus crucified, they had seen him walk the earth as the resurrected Lord, and they had seen him ascend to heaven. What more can a person really go through?

Here we also see the importance of the number fifty. We know numbers are important in the Bible and here fifty signifies something very important.

Commentary reminds us that “the giving of the Torah occurred roughly fifty days after Passover as an act of covenant renewal.”^{iv} This is why so many more Jews were in Jerusalem they were there to celebrate the Feast of Weeks and God’s “goodness to the nation.”^v In other words, here we see God once again showing the link from the covenant of Abraham and Moses to the new covenant made possible through the blood of Jesus Christ.

God took this opportunity through this huge crowd to reign down fire and wind so that people would come to believe in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This moment for the disciples was a time of renewal of their faith so they could go forward and continue to do the work of God.

The past seven weeks we have been talking about renewal. We talked about John Wesley’s progression of faith as he came to understand God’s love in the intertwining of his head and heart. So today we also have the opportunity to experience a revival of our faith.

Today we celebrate what God has done and what God is going to do. We do this when we look at how God appeared in the form of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Through wind the disciples first encountered the Holy Spirit. Commentary tells us this is reminiscent of God’s creative action in our lives.^{vi}

In Genesis 1:1-2 we see that “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

On Pentecost through the Holy Spirit God was creating the church. Today also marks the birthday of church!

The church is the vehicle that would continue to carry Christianity through the ages. God’s creative action still happens in our lives every day when new ministries are born, when new people come to church, and when we learn to love each other as Jesus Christ loved us.

For me, I most closely feel the presence of the Holy Spirit when I am outside in the mountains and the wind rustles through the leaves or the grass. We cannot see the wind directly, but we can see the effect of the wind happening all around us and so it is with God. How do you experience the Holy Spirit?

Although we cannot see God face to face, we can see the realm of heaven on earth all around us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The second way the disciples experienced the Holy Spirit was through the tongues of fire. This fire is reminiscent of the Old Testament when God led the Israelites by a pillar of fire by night through the wilderness.^{vii} God saved the Israelites through fire, the light that led them forward towards the Promised Land. In the Bible we also read about fire being something that refines us (Zechariah 13:9).

This is part of experiencing God’s revival in our lives. God refines us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom and helps us understand how to do better and how to more closely reflect Christ who lives within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We can learn a lot from this Scripture from Acts 2. First, we are reminded that waiting is a spiritual discipline.

Now we know all about waiting. During this pandemic we have been waiting for things to go back to normal. We have been waiting for businesses and schools to reopen and even our beloved churches to reopen. Yet, sometimes we forget that waiting is part of who we are as the people of God.

The Israelites had to wait forty years before reaching the Promised Land and the disciples had to wait fifty days for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples even had to wait three days for Jesus to rise from the dead.

Waiting is a time of preparation for what is ahead. For the disciples there would be no going back to normal. After his resurrection Jesus had ascended to heaven, so life as they knew it would never be the same, but God was still with them.

As we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit on this Pentecost Sunday, we remember that God is still with us even in our time of waiting.

The second thing we can learn from Acts 2 is that God is always pushing us forward into a new normal. It is not something for us to be afraid of, but something to embrace.

One thing this pandemic has taught us is that the church can still be the church beyond the doors of the church. We have continued to gather with one another albeit virtually. We have continued to worship God. We have continued to pray for one another and check on one another. We have continued to show God’s love to the community.

So, as we move forward into this time of new normal, this opportunity for revival, what is one thing God has taught you during this time of waiting?

Has God taught you patience? Has God encouraged you to get back to something that gives you life? Has God pointed you to spend more time in the Scriptures?

I know that God has taught me patience, and God has reminded me of the fragility of life and not to take anything for granted.

As we prepare to gather again together in person there are some things we can continue to do in our lives as we experience revival from the Holy Spirit.

- 1) Give God thanks for the gift of the church.

I know we all love our churches and soon we will get to go back, but the church is not just about buildings it is about the people of God. Wherever we gather together in the name of God, God is with us.

- 2) Give God thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For many people the Holy Spirit is the most elusive person in the trinity. While it seems that the concept of Father and Son are easy to understand, the concept of Spirit seems to be a lot harder.

At a previous church, a woman once confessed to our small group that she did not think she had ever experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit. We encouraged her to pay special attention to how God was calling her to serve and what was happening around her.

At our final small group meeting this woman shared that the Holy Spirit had been working this whole time in her life, and now she could recognize it!

The good news for our lives today is that the Holy Spirit continues to lead us forward to new life even in this time of uncertainty.

May we continue to gather as the church, even outside our sanctuaries, to do the work of God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Liturgy for the service of UMC Ordination. Online: https://www.umc.org/en/content/spirit-empowered-church-authorized-united-methodist-ordination?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwr32BRD4ARIsAAJNf_3L5HaCJgFVPzU3a0P2axFlmMxhQPajLP6kqR-aqC7B8nIUc8A9L1gaAurkEALw_wcB.

ⁱⁱ <https://godshotspot.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/disciples-in-upper-room/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary.” Vol. X. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995. P. 54

^v Ibid. P. 53.

^{vi} Ibid. P. 54.

^{vii} Ibid.