

I love Pentecost because it's one of the few church festival days where the Holy Spirit takes center stage and I'm a huge fan of the Holy Spirit. In today's readings, we have two versions of the Pentecost story: Acts 2 is the most popular version, with the Holy Spirit whooshing in with wind and tongues of fire and the effect is immediate. Then in John, we have Jesus gently breathing the Holy Spirit onto the disciples and it seems to take some time before anything happens. In both instances, the Holy Spirit enters the disciples and they are sent forth to continue the work of Jesus. The great thing about Pentecost is that it was not a one-time deal or limited to just the disciples; Pentecost still happens today. It happens in our personal lives; it happens in congregations; it happens in communities; it can happen anywhere and with anyone. Pentecost happens whenever the Spirit comes in, things happen, and people come to believe. For some of us, maybe our personal Pentecost was a big, dramatic event that left us saying, "Wow!" For others of us, it may have been so subtle that we didn't necessarily realize it right away.

When I was at camp, there used to be a blindfold trust course through the woods. Essentially, it was a rope strung through the trees, over, around, and even under obstacles. And there were two or three places where the rope seemed to come to an abrupt end, only to continue at a higher or lower level on the tree. The participants were blindfolded away from the trail and then led to the beginning, one by one. As each was brought to the start, their hand was placed on the rope and they were told to, "Go." They knew they'd reached the end when someone told them, "You made it. You can take off your blindfold." What they couldn't see was that there were a few quiet helpers scattered along the path to make sure no one went face first into a tree or to give a little help if someone really got stuck.

Now, having watched many groups go through this course, I discovered that everyone fell into one of just a handful of different reaction categories for how they responded to the course. Some of the folks, apparently having no fear – or perhaps no common sense – would take off at a near run, as though it was a timed event with a prize waiting for them at the end. Others would call out to their friends up ahead, asking about the obstacles coming up and then relaying that information to those behind them. Then there are those with a death grip on

the rope, wildly swing an arm and a leg out in front of them to warn them of obstacles. And, of course, there are the folks who, with their hand comfortably on the rope, just take it a step at a time. But in every single group, there is always that one person who, partway through the course, lets go of the rope. Crazy, right? They're in the middle of the woods, blindfolded and surrounded by obstacles and they let go! Now, some just happen to stumble and lose their grip. Others, though, do it out of arrogance or a need to prove that they can do it on their own without any help. Regardless of their reason, they all veer off course and get into dangerous territory. But then those quiet, invisible helpers step in and help steer them back to the path with nudges and whispers.

Our faith journey is that path through the woods: Christ is the rope that guides us to the promised end and the Holy Spirit is that ever-present invisible helper that nudges us and whispers in our ears when we get stuck or wander off track. Which of those blindfolded people do you identify with?

I was one of those who let go of the rope. I reached a point in my late 20's after years in outdoor ministry when my focus was no longer on Christ and, instead, was on my own ego. It was no longer about sharing the gifts the Spirit had given me for the ministry of Christ. Instead, I started keeping tally, comparing what I felt I had given with what I felt "the church" was giving me in return. It was no longer about being a disciple of Christ sent forth to do as Jesus did but about feeding my own ego with a sense of self-importance. I decided I'd given enough, so, I let go of the rope and walked away. I flailed about in arrogance for a long time, so sure that I didn't need God and could do it on my own. But one day, I realized just how empty I was and that I couldn't do it on my own. The Holy Spirit was right there, whispering in my ear, "Reach out and grab the rope." That was my Pentecost.

Every single person here has been given a gift by the Holy Spirit. These spiritual gifts are God-given graces meant for works of service and to build up the body of Christ. When Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian church, the church was divided and the misunderstanding of gifts was rife. Different factions claimed that their gifts were superior to other gifts and gifts were used for personal gain rather than the body of Christ. It's a struggle some Christian churches still deal with

today. But these gifts have been given as the Spirit sees fit, not us, and all of them are for the common good. Whether you have been called to be a minister or a teacher, whether you have the gift of prophesy, service or encouragement – there is no gift that is more important than any other gift. And every single person in this congregation, whether you come every Sunday, just on holidays, or it's your first time here, every single one of us is a child of God and a part of the body of Christ. And by "body of Christ", I'm not talking a loose social organization here like the Sons of Norway. No. We are baptized in the Holy Spirit to be one body with many parts and many gifts. When we as a congregation let the Spirit flow through us, amazing things can happen.

Through water and fire, we are children of God and filled with the Holy Spirit. Please turn to the person sitting on either side of you and bless them by making the sign of the cross on their forehead and saying, "You are a child of God."