

Pentecost B**John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-21****Pastor Chris Bellefeuille****June 3-4, 2006**

The Advocate

I came to know Kendra because our husbands were college roommates. Although there is not much on which we agree theologically, I have learned a lot from her. Kendra is a woman of deep and abiding faith and she has a very rich devotional life. She talks about Jesus or the Lord as casually as she would any friend. She often begins a conversation by saying: "I was driving in my car the other day just talking to the Lord and..." If you visit her home there is always a sticky note on the bathroom mirror with the latest Bible verse she is working to commit to memory.

One conversation I had with her really sticks in my mind even though I don't remember most of it. Kendra began by saying: "As I go into the grocery store, I pray, God, please let me be Jesus to someone today. If they look in my eyes, let them see Jesus." What a prayer! Have you ever prayed that prayer? "Lord, whoever looks into my eyes today, let them see Jesus."

For years I have heard or read these words of Jesus in the Gospel of John about the Advocate. I have always heard them as the Spirit coming to be my Advocate, to ease the way in the world for me, to sustain and support ME. And to a degree that is true. But that is not what Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is sending HIS advocate. Jesus is sending his proxy, his representative to speak for HIM, and it is through US that the Spirit of Christ intends to carry out the work of Jesus. He says: "The Spirit of truth will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify!" Kendra prayed her prayer because she understands what it means to testify, to witness to the love of Jesus Christ. Kendra understands that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit *in* her and working *with* her, that bears Jesus to the world, together they testify!

In Acts we read that when the promised Spirit arrives, every disciple is given the voice, the language so that all can hear the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is the very same spirit that is washed into us in Baptism and lives in us as church. Jesus says: "You also are to testify." We are not to be docile, passive conduits for the Spirit. Jesus calls us to raise our voices and our hands WITH the Holy Spirit to give testimony on his behalf.

I liked my old understanding that the Holy Spirit as for me; the warmth and inspiration as my encouragement, my Advocate. And again, that is partly true. But if the Holy Spirit that dwells in me is Jesus' advocate, it's almost more scary than it is warm and inspiring. It forces me to ask myself: how am I testifying? What kind of witness am I? When they look in my eyes, will they see Jesus? And how do I know that what is impelling me to act is the Holy Spirit and not my own desires and ambitions?

This weekend we celebrate the festival of Pentecost, this great and holy day when the Spirit of God rushed like a wind through the tiny, early church and inflamed the disciples with the power to testify. Peter gave a great and stirring speech and 3000 people were baptized on that day. Today we are also celebrating the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit in God's people and in God's church. We are celebrating the Baptism of little Charles Henry Seel...just 7 months old and we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of Pastor Wayne's ordination.

This day becomes a Pentecost day of sorts for Charlie as he is washed in word and water and sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ. There are not separate events! That mark of the cross indicates whose spirit it is that lives and moves in Charlie... the Spirit of Jesus Christ! Jesus' advocate will call Charlie to testify with him through his words when he has them! And through his work when he begins it!

In March of 1955 Wayne Bennett Peterson was washed in water and in word and sealed by the same Spirit and marked by the same cross. As he approached adulthood, the Spirit of Christ began to stir in Wayne in a special way. And that he responded to the call to enter seminary. On June 6, 1981, Bishop Herbert Chilstrom called upon Jesus to pour out that same Spirit on each of the 10 ordinands to fill them with the fruits and the gifts of grace, to testify.

Neither baptism, nor ordination is a private affair. Because it is the assembly of the people of God that affirms the presence of the real Spirit of Jesus Christ. We gather as the disciples did, each lit by the Holy Spirit, each kindled with the same but separate fires, each given language to testify to Jesus Christ in a way that can be understood by others. Some through preaching and administering sacraments, some through art and banners and making spaces beautiful, some through composing, singing or playing music, some through teaching and mentoring, some through warming our bodies with food or hand-made scarves and quilts, some through discerning business practices or the art of health care. Some through legislative office and political action for justice. But like the disciples, if we join our voices to testify, there is language enough for all to hear.

When the Spirit blew through, the Advocate of Jesus Christ rested on each disciple, not one was spared! All were called to testify and the people gathered there affirmed that they could indeed hear the love of Jesus Christ in the language that was spoken. The experience of the Spirit will be unique to each of us, but we share the same spirit and it is by gathering together as one body that we can affirm that Spirit at work in one another. Today especially we affirm the Holy Spirit as we celebrate with Charlie and with Wayne and we pray that the Spirit continue to work in each of our lives and in our life together as the people of St. Barnabas.

Amen