

May 31, 2020 Sermon from Pastor Jon

Baccalaureate Sunday

Pentecost Sunday

To our graduates as you move on to the next phase of your life, “May the Force be With You!”

And as a good Lutheran you might say, “And Also with You.”

I was trying to think of a way to translate the Pentecost story in a language that you might easily understand... the language of Star Wars.

I think of Obi-Wan Kenobi saying to young Jedi, Luke Skywalker, as he shipped him off to learn Yoda, “May the force be with you.” This was a phrase Obi-Wan used often to wish an individual or group good luck or good will, one that expressed his wish that the good in the **Force** work in the favor of the addressee.

The **Force** in Star Wars is a mysterious energy field that binds the galaxy together. Harnessing the power of the **Force** gives the Jedi, the Sith, and others sensitive to this spiritual energy extraordinary abilities, such as levitating objects, tricking minds, and seeing things before they happen.

We have a “force” too, in the church... the Holy Spirit. You received it in your Baptism, just like Jesus did in his Baptism when the heavens opened up and Spirit descended on him like a dove. After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit cast him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and 40 nights before he began his public ministry. This sounds like college for me. No doubt, you will face many temptations and challenges along the way. But the Holy Spirit can guide you through your own wilderness.

The Holy Spirit is God, one of the persons of the Trinity. Some refer to it as the Holy Ghost. It is the force behind our spiritual energy as Christians. It is the force that gave birth to the church at Pentecost in our first reading today. Jesus promised his Padawans that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and Fire. And it happened as Jesus promised.

According to Luther's Small Catechism Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed, The Holy Spirit calls us through the gospel, enlightens us with gifts, set us apart, and keeps us in the one, true faith. As we hear the story of Jesus, the Spirit moves in our life and awakens our faith. "The Force Awakens"... our faith that is.

The Holy Spirit, which can also be translated as the Holy Wind or Holy Breath of God, is constantly blowing through the church, the world, and through us. It is the spiritual force for good that communicates God's dream for the world. The Holy Spirit gives each of us spiritual gifts... maybe not levitating or tricking minds... but prophesying, teaching, singing, playing music, praying, healing, speaking, etc. You are unique in the gifts God gave you and you are called to share them boldly in this present and post-corona virus world. The problem comes in when we compare our gifts to others. Which we all do as humans. But trust that God made you exactly the way you should be.

Finally, I want to say one more thing about the Pentecost story that addresses the church and our world right now. The Pentecost shows that the Holy Spirit transcends our differences. Our differences seem to be dividing us right now in America. Even wearing a mask in public has become politicized... which is ridiculous to me. Some people fear diversity instead of embracing it. And the racial divide seems to be growing as riots recently took place in Minneapolis over the death of Floyd at the hands of a white police officer. But the Holy Spirit calls us as Christians to a different narrative.

Recall in the Pentecost story, the Holy Spirit moved the disciples from a place of exclusion to a place of inclusion. From inside to outside. It gave each of them the ability to speak a new language in order to share the story of Jesus to all hearers. Jewish people from many different nations including Greeks, Arabs, Romans, Africans, and Asians could hear about Jesus' Resurrection in their own native language. Debra Mumford, an African American Biblical Scholar wrote on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), "On this one day, the Holy Spirit transcended multiple layers of differences to accomplish God's many purposes."

Peter, who was now preaching to the crowd saw this moment as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all people. Peter quotes Joel, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy.

What a beautiful image of diversity. Young and old, men and women, slave and free receive the Holy Spirit.

Debra Mumford asks the questions: How many of our differences could be transcended if we allowed the power of the Holy Spirit to reign in our lives? What miracles could the Holy Spirit perform in our churches and communities if we embraced it and invited it into our midst? How many hearts and minds could the Holy Spirit possibly transform, if we prayed for the Holy Spirit to have its ways in our communities?

Like Galatians 5 says, we would have more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Come Holy Spirit, Come.

And may the "The Holy Spirit" be with you all. And also with you.