

Pastor Roy's sermon from May 20, 2018 (Day of Pentecost)

As I read today's readings, some verses stood out to me. Often, surprising, unexpected verses contain particularly profound faith-forming truths.

In Romans we are told that we often have no idea how to pray, and that the Spirit prays for us. That's humbling. But also comforting because it reminds us that prayer is not about you and me being strong, being in control, or saying the right things. Prayer is about profound humility, silence, waiting, listening and at times, stumbling, halting, uncertainty. We have nothing to offer God when we pray. We can only receive and long for others to receive of the God's goodness and mercy. This cuts to the quick of our faith as *faith* not certainty. We are servants offering ourselves, our moments back to God for God to make of it all what God will.

True prayer is a confession and embrace of our own weakness. Two weeks ago, before all the rain I was mowing around the garden in our backyard and I got really tired. We have a number of mowers, my favorite is the reel mower—the old fashioned kind that cuts when you push it and doesn't when you stop. Cutting grass with that thing is the best workout I've ever experienced. In my work, I need exercise since sitting and talking to people and typing on my computer doesn't provide a good cardiovascular workout. I got really tired and I just laid down in the backyard and it felt good to look up at the sky and sun flat on my back. Soon there were two faces licking me. For a moment, I was where I belonged and all was right in the world. That is an emotional word picture of prayer. True prayer is being with God in God's world.

We find another unexpected saying in John 15. He says, basically, you will be better off without me. This is the Gospel of John, not Jesus Christ Superstar. So, we need to pay attention here. Jesus is about to go away. They will no longer be following him. They will be on their own. Now if anyone leads, it will be them. Having followed Jesus, now they must live into their own faith. They are now leaders in this Way of Jesus. A life of prayer—a life they can only experience. . .on their own.

Pentecost is a celebration of this life. . .on our own. Participating, not just observing. The Spirit leads us into ministry, into service, into justice, into a peace which is the gift of God which begins with prayer. And remember, prayer is not what we are supposed to do, but it is what we do when we grow weary of running away from ourselves and God and our friends and family. . .and stop long enough to hear another voice. The voice of the Spirit. . .of God. The Spirit does not make their lives easy, the Spirit makes their lives difficult. Their lives become more difficult because they follow the call to live with love toward their sisters and brothers, toward their neighbors, toward total strangers whom they might have otherwise ignored.

This is a troublesome Spirit we celebrate today. The Spirit takes our hand and invites us to a holy adventure in mercy. We pray not with power and influence, but with an uncertainty of where this troublesome Spirit might lead us next. Ask Philip who met the Ethiopian single man as he was dragged from town to town by this Spirit. Ask Stephen who was stoned for speaking honestly. Ask the disciples who lost sight of their beloved mentor and savior and spent the rest of their lives looking for him. . .in the eyes of friends and strangers alike.

The Holy Spirit is not comfort food. Just as the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is not comfort food. It is freedom because in opening ourselves to faith we are no longer in bondage to our fears, anxieties, and need to be in control. We are slowly learning the secret of freedom as we allow ourselves to fall into God's grace, moment by moment, failure by failure, troublesome moment by troublesome moment.

This troublesome Spirit, which we celebrate and receive with fear and trembling, is the only path to true freedom, to peace, to joy. Let us receive this Spirit with courage and a willingness to open ourselves to live an uncertain life in the mercy and unconditional love of God. Amen.