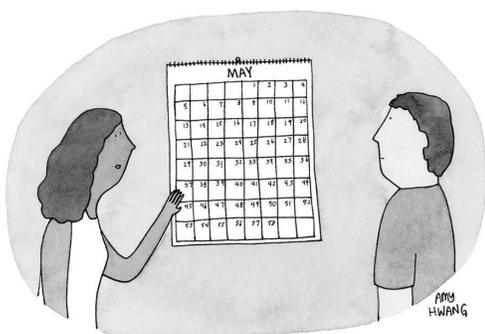




Sermon for the Day of Pentecost  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
May 31, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's begin this morning with a few more cartoons – I thought these were pretty funny, let's see what you think.



*"This calendar has the number of days it feels like."*



*"But, Mommy, we just played find your glasses this morning."*



*"You're wrong, Ted, this is absolutely the right time to organize three decades of photos."*

Today is the Feast Day of Pentecost, the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter and the day we celebrate and remember the beginning of a new work of the Holy Spirit in the life of humanity. We heard the story in our reading from Acts: how the disciples gathered in the temple on this day, ten days after they had witnessed Jesus's ascension, and while they were in worship they experienced the Holy Spirit of God in a whole new way that people had not previously experienced the Spirit: welling up from within their hearts and minds, descending on them from above, and deepening their awareness of their connection with God through Christ.

The identity and work of the Holy Spirit can be difficult to wrap our minds around, and the Scriptures use many images to try to help us grasp the nature of the third person of the Trinity: love, fire, flowing water, miraculous connections between people, and a rushing wind are all among the images. I want to share with you this morning an image that I have found useful at times, perhaps you will too.

Here is a painting that hangs on the wall in our home. Beth asked a good friend of ours, Jan Taylor, to create this painting as a birthday gift for me some years ago when we lived in Nashville, TN. The painting is made from a photograph that was taken back in the 1970s, when I was just a kid.



If you zoom in closer you can see that in the center of these beautiful mountains stand three figures: a man and two small children. They are, in fact, my Dad, my brother, and myself – I’m on the viewer’s left and my brother is on the right. The photo which this painting depicts was taken at the end of a hike to the top of Looking Glass Rock in Pisgah National Forest. I believe I was probably 5 or 6 years old and my brother a year younger.

Looking at the painting one day my Mom commented, “I wonder where I was that day, I’m not in the picture.” We puzzled for a moment or two about that and then I realized: my Mom was the one who took the photograph. Though we cannot see her in the frame she is very much present in the painting – this is actually a family portrait and, in fact, it is fair to say that this picture of a Father and his children could not exist without her. It is through her work as photographer that we are enabled to see the love, communion, and grace of this family portrait.

That is an image of the Holy Spirit. Part of the reason that the Holy Spirit is difficult to see, to understand, and to take hold of, is because the Holy Spirit is the means by which we see all else. The Holy Spirit is the photographer who stands outside the picture and makes the picture possible.

In the case of my mom, her photography made the portrait of me, my Dad, and my brother possible. In the case of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit’s work in our lives makes it possible for us to see and understand our place in God’s life as brothers and sisters of Jesus and children of his Father in heaven. If a portrait were to be painted of the picture the Holy Spirit gives us of ourselves and God, that portrait would show us much like me and my brother: embraced safely in the Father’s love as his own adopted children. Amen.