

**PENTECOST**  
**Church of the Holy Comforter**  
**The Rev. John E. Shields**  
**May 31, 2009**

**“Girl Interrupted” is a movie starring Winona Ryder. It came out in 2002 – you can get it now on DVD or Netflix. It is not just a good movie, but also a true story about a teenage girl who is institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital when her behavior gets to be more than her parents can handle.**

**The hospitalization dramatically interrupts this young woman’s life --- It probably should not have happened --- but the movie does end with the main character moving on, and with considerable struggle, moving beyond the stigma associated with being institutionalized.**

**Interruptions are often very powerful, sometimes destructive and sometimes wonderful. Interruptions are often irritating and cause us great discomfort. Interruptions are also those things that often end up defining our lives or who we are.**

**Certainly all the things that have happened recently in our economy – the stock market, the job markets, bankruptcies, foreclosures, mergers, acquisitions – the list goes on – these are profound interruptions and affect all our lives.**

**Today is the feast of Pentecost: the empowering of the community by the Holy Spirit to become the church. In the gospel we just read, the disciples are told that Christ is leaving them in order that they might be empowered by the Holy Spirit. This spirit is referred to in several ways: Advocate, Counselor, Guide, Holy Comforter.**

**In our first lesson, we find a large crowd assembled. In this event, the Holy Spirit of God interrupts and infuses the entire assembly. That is a raucous and amazing event. All kinds of people are suddenly empowered to understand one another. Now the only way that understanding could happen would be for them to talk to one another.**

**In fact, what happens at Pentecost is the very reversal of the Old Testament story known as the Tower of Babel – in which you will recall -- persons were, in their arrogance, going to build a tower into the heavens. God interrupts and humbles the people by giving them different languages so that they do not understand one another, and the tower falls.**

**Now, at Pentecost, that process is reversed – people of different languages understand one another. What does that say to us? Well, it says a lot of things. It says that the church of God - the church you belong to - was born out of the power of the Spirit. It was not born out of correctness and politeness.**

**The church of God was born out of fire and wind and people talking in foreign tongues, but being understood. The church of God was one in which, and is one in which the estranged are now joined - that which was foreign is now made familiar.**

**God interrupts the scene and the situation and causes great change to occur.**

**Actually, as a community, we are in the midst of a huge interruption. That's right! We are being interrupted from our "business as usual" normal way of doing things here at Holy Comforter.**

**We have lost our rector and associate rector – two key leaders of our parish. We are about to tear down a building that we have used (temporarily) for over forty years. We are about to embark on the building of a new building – talk about interruptions, as they say up in the country, ‘you ain’t seen nothing yet.’**

**We are in the middle of a transition period and that can be unsettling and uncomfortable – what is going to happen? Are we going to be all right?**

**Do you suppose that the Holy Spirit could be part of this endeavor?**

**How will we know if the Holy Spirit is present in this time of interruption?**

**Do you remember how Jesus interrupted the disciples when they were locked up in fear after his sentence of Capital Punishment had been carried out? They were frightened and isolated – they were hiding behind locked doors, yet Jesus, now resurrected, comes among them and their fear is overcome.**

**Perhaps we will have our own anxieties relieved if we remember that God’s calming and life-giving spirit is present and with us -- if we will but take the time and patience to pray for it and find it.**

**In the Acts account of the interruption by the Spirit, the people understood one another, as they had never had before. Even though their languages and backgrounds were dissimilar, they understood each other. You have to wonder if they maybe understood one another because they also listened and paid more attention to each other, because of the interruption.**

**Perhaps we too shall achieve a greater understanding of one another during this time of interruption if we will listen to each other more carefully, if we insure that all are given a chance to speak their concerns and needs - even if those voices might be different from our own. Perhaps then, we too will achieve understanding and unity, as did those early Christians on the day of Pentecost.**

**So on this day – of Pentecost--- the day of the Holy Comforter – who is also the Holy Interrupter --- let us remember as individuals dealing with our own interruptions and as a community of faith, that our God is ever with us, he does not leave us comfortless – God is there as Advocate, Counselor, Guide and Comforter --- our task is to remain faithful and trust that our God is literally as close to us as our next breath.**

**Let us pray: “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.” Amen**