Sermon, May 19, 2024
"When Words Fail "
Day of Pentecost
For St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

Introduction – What are we doing? If you were here last Pentecost, perhaps you remember. Are we sitting in rocking chairs because we're too old to stand? No, but perhaps we mirror the early disciples huddled together in an upper room. Talking to each other, trying to process those resurrection appearances of their friend, Jesus. Trying to figure out what to do next. So let's go back to a different room over 50 days earlier, the room of the Last Supper and Jesus had a special message for them.

1st Reflection John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15
In the gospel today, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit is not only coming, but is here. We have been promised that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the presence of the Risen Jesus in his physical absence, is with us, that the Spirit has freed us from the law of sin and of death, that the Spirit searches the depths of our hearts, prays in us when we cannot find the words, pours the love of God into our hearts and gives us hope. Sounds great, huh? But are there times when you know something but it's more on the surface and hasn't sunk deep into your bones? Are there times when you know what you need to do for yourself or another person but you can't find the energy, can't seem to get off the starting block. That's what we're going to hear about next, an infusion of unbridled energy, called the Holy Spirit. Remember that those disciples gathered in an upper room because they were afraid. They were in danger but not from outsiders—the danger they were in was from a God who is about to crash the party and bring in everyone they were trying to avoid. Let's hear what happened.

2nd Reflection Acts 2:1-21
This gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was no individual prize. It wasn't then and isn't now something to be put in a scrapbook, hidden in a treasure chest, kept under a bed although I often hear people who have moved away from the church describing that they "made" their Confirmation at 13 and haven't been back since, as if the Holy Spirit is something that can be confined to a frame on the wall or an item in a resume.
No it seems clear that the Holy Spirit is anything but that, a veritable hot potato, a cyclone even. Katherine Glenn compares the cyclone in the Wizard of Oz to the Pentecost event:
• Things were normal, grumbly, not very happy, until THE WIND came.
• Picked up the house, Dorothy, Toto and all, and took them to a place where NOTHING WAS THE SAME
• Little people dancing around

• Monkeys who could fly
• Unexpected dangers
• Friends with unexplainable gifts - Courage, Compassion, Wisdom—
without anything to offer a rational explanation for their presence
• The Emerald City—beautiful, full of promise
• HERE'S THE RUB: At least on the surface, the Wizard was a fraud. But was he really? He put on a big show and was just a normal guy with a great need for attention and adoration.
• BUT—The Wizard knew Dorothy had what she needed all along to take her back home
• What about when she got back to Kansas? Was everything at home different? No, DOROTHY WAS DIFFERENT! She experienced her life with a soul made light by the wind, with eyes made bright with the spark of the Holy Spirit.
One indisputable fact of Christianity is that these disciples were changed. They went from being cowards to courageous. And these disciples went out and made more disciples, and more and more, to where gathering in chairs together wasn't the only way to communicate. Let's hear what Paul said in one of his letters to the Christians in Rome when he felt they needed a reminder that the Holy Spirit was still with them.

3rd Reflection: Romans 8:22-27
In "Shrek the Musical" our hero/ogre Shrek, smitten with the beautiful Princess Fiona but not knowing how to tell her sings,
"When words fail what will I do?
When words fail how will she know how I feel?
When words fail will I fail too?"
Aren't there times when words fail all of us? Think of all the ways we communicate when words fail:
We scream in fear, squeal with delight, roar with anger, sigh in exasperation, groan in pain, wail or sob when overcome with sadness, grunt with dissatisfaction, guffaw in laughter and on and on . . .

Now as good Episcopalians perhaps we don't relate to Shrek (perhaps in more ways than one) because, well frankly, words don't often fail us – at least not in our liturgy. By an approximate count not even including the words in the hymns that we'll sing out of the hymnal and not counting the announcements it looks like through this service we'll use 3,162 words. This sermon in case you are wondering adds another 1100 words and we are at 950 right now. And even with all these words St. Paul in today's epistle has the temerity to say we do not know how to pray as we ought, the nerve of him, he clearly wasn't an Episcopalian – why we have exactly 1001 pages of words in our Prayer Book! But take heart, Shrek, for St. Paul also reminds us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness for that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according

to the will of God". Well it worked for Shrek – he of course had a happy ending marrying the beautiful princess.

Words are great things – they can give us insight, comfort, teaching, encouragement, love, peace and strength. But like Shrek we will find there are times they will fail us. No matter – actions still speak louder than words and may that great cyclone of the Holy Spirit push us out into the world like the first disciples and what we will do or say – don't worry – the Spirit will take care of it. The Spirit goes to a depth we, as humans, find hard to touch — somewhere deep in our souls, our own spirits, a place where our incredible beauty dwells, that place of "image and likeness of God." The Spirit knows our place of beauty even when we can't see it for ourselves, hidden as it might be because of our weakness or fragile faith. May our souls, like Dorothy's, be made light by the wind and our eyes bright with the spark of the Holy Spirit.