

*Come Holy Spirit  
Use me to Your glory*

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*“Thumbs up!” May this declaration when heard always remind me of Wendy. Her presence was an unexpected gift for my birthday.*

*On this day, the plan was for me to attend a silent retreat held at the Burford Priory Guest House. This is an Anglican Benedictine community in the middle of the Cotswolds in England. By chance, I'd read one of the local churches bulletins that mentioned the availability of this ecumenical quiet day. I was thrilled for I had been looking for an activity so that my darling husband could go guilt-free to a very important reception that he needed to attend at Oxford University where he teaches.*

*He kept insisting that he'd rather be with me all day on my birthday. That was fine and dandy, but he truly did need to attend this reception. Now I had an activity, one that I knew he knew would appeal to me and thus be happily occupied. Oh, a quiet day! Yes! From 10-4! Yes! It would be just my cup of tea and then we could meet later for a birthday dinner date.*

*All was set. A perfect day planned. There were eight of us who gathered at the Priory. The presenter was a Methodist minister. The morning session focused on the disunity of the Church and the afternoon session focused on its possible unity.*

*Most of the presentation was done in silence with the use of an overhead projector. Poignant questions were thrown out. Each one seemed to convict me more and more. How did I personally play a part in the Church's disunity?*

*He set a table in the middle of us with symbolic props. Birdseed represented people. Egg cartons became various local churches in the area. He used vases and water and flowers to represent different denominations. He slowly built up a powerful image of the divisions within our Christian world.*

*In silence, at the beginning, he had taken a pretty porcelain cup and saucer and offered it to each one of us as Christ had offered his body and blood. Then he began flashing up dates on the wall; each marked yet another division within the church. He wrapped up the cup and saucer and took a hammer and hit the dishes with each new divisional date. Goodness, did that sound break the silence. Each hit hammered the point home: Division.*

*700 AD Orthodox and Roman Catholic break. BAM!*

*1534 Anglican break. BAM!*

*1620 Congregation break. BAM!*

*1633 Baptist break. BAM!*

*1646 Quaker break. BAM!*

*1739 Methodist break. BAM!*

*1830 Plymouth Brethren break. BAM!*

*1910 Elín Pentecost break. BAM!*

*1933 Community break. BAM!*

*I wasn't familiar, Pilgrim, with all the named divisions but it didn't matter. The point was powerfully made. There is much disunity within Christ's church.*

*The scriptures on which we focused were John 17:20-23 and Ephesians 4:1-6,16. In John it says:*

*"Jesus prayed to His Father God about us: My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

*"all of them may be one"*

*"brought in complete unity"*

*On hearing the desires of our Lord Jesus, each word seemed to stick in my crawl. And then to listen to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6,16 -- his admonition of how we, Christ's Church are to behave. He says:*

*"As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit just as you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and*

*Father of all. From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting fragment, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

*Ah, Pilgrim, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

*"Builds itself up in love, as each part does its work"*

*Oww! We are told to not grieve the Spirit. Do you think some of our petty bickerings or prideful self-righteousness grieves the Spirit? Do you think some of our "my way's better than your way" grieves the Spirit? Do you think division is of the Lord or of us?*

*We were reminded that unity does not mean uniformity. Our God is a creative God and of course His church is gloriously diverse. It is as it should be. Can we celebrate our differences instead of letting them divide us?*

*Paul called us to "be humble, gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love." I don't think, Pilgrim, we can fix or change or rearrange the church, but the Holy Spirit can. It is his work to do, but we must be willing to cooperate, to say, and truly mean, "Thy will be done." It is his work to do, but we must be able to believe and to claim and to live out King David's words in Psalm 133:1:*

*"Oh how good and pleasant it is when our brethren live together in unity."*

*And why has "thumbs up," Pilgrim, become an important icon for me and will always remind me of this "unity-focused*

*birthday?"*

*One of the participants named Wendy. She has a rare debilitating disease. Speechless, wheelchair bound, she could only communicate with us by her thumb -- up for a positive response, down for a negative response. She was able to attend only the morning session, the one on disunity.*

*Our presenter gave his presentation in silence. We participants also sat in silence, soaking up the teaching. For me, Wendy's presence has become a powerful part of the teaching. Her breathing was very labored. As we learned more and more about the Church's broken history, I became more and more aware of her struggling for each breath. Even her name, Wendy, took on a meaningful symbol for wind -- the Ruach of God -- the Holy Spirit. Had our actions of disunity over the centuries, over the millennium been stifling the breath of God?*

*I was working myself up into a real sadness of heart and then it was time to break for a silent lunch and then on to our focusing on unity and what that might look like and feel like. Wendy had to leave, but as she did, she gave a thumb's up sign to me. It was a profound benediction blessing.*

*She helped remind me that "all is well." Our Father God is in charge. We are a victorious, Resurrection People. Yes, Pilgrim, there was and is disunity within the church, but I do believe our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's prayer is being worked out and answered. He prayed to his Father God, "May*

*they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

*We just need to keep the main thing, the main thing “Jesus is Lord” -- and take on that “humility and gentleness and patience and bearing one another in love” that Paul recommended and above all, as he suggested, “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Ah, Pilgrim, do you sense the breath of God flowing more freely just with prayerful thought?*

*One of the older ladies shared this prayer with me. She has recited it each morning most of her 80+ years. I'd like to end your letter with it.*

*“Come Holy Spirit enlighten my heart  
to see the things which are of God  
Come Holy Spirit into my mind that I may  
know the things which are of God  
Come Holy Spirit into my soul that belongs  
Only to God  
Sanctify all that I think, say or do  
That all will be for the glory of God.”  
Amen.*

*Unity. That sounds like a uniting prayer in that the word is of the Holy Spirit -- may we be the instruments of Love and Peace.*

*Thumbs up for unity!*

*Your sister in Christ,*

*Lucy*