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## *Pentecost Homily and Thanksgiving for the Ministry of David Fishburn*

**An Evensong Homily by Dean Sam Candler**  
**Pentecost – Year B**

Grace to you, and Peace, in Jesus Christ, our Lord! I have often thought that Pentecost, the Feast of Pentecost, should be the annual festival day for choirs and musicians. I know that our traditions honor St. Cecelia as the patron saint of all things musical. She is certainly worthy. Others have declared that St. Gregory the Great be so honored.

But what is music except the opportunity to hear God's glory proclaimed in different languages?

*Now there were devout ones from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." (Acts 2:5–13)*

How is it that each of us hear one glorious sound, in so many beautiful languages? What we have just heard described is exactly what a symphony is, what a beautiful choral anthem is, what a majestic organ piece is!

Parthians, Medes, Elamites? Who are they except Basses, Sopranos, and Organists?

Residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia? They are the English choristers, French organists, medieval motets, Bach chorales, Anglican psalms!

"In our own languages, we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Exactly. The miracle of Pentecost is not that so many people spoke in different tongues. The miracle was in the hearing. People heard one message, one unified and perfectly blended song of glory. It was every English choral director's delight.

And we all know how sounds can collide instead of blend. We all know how personalities can crash instead of cohere. The gift of music is about the power to harmonize all sorts of various expressions of God's creation! Music brings together Parthians and Medes, Altos and Tenors, Mesopotamians and Cappadocians, English and French, and even Americans. Even classical and folk. Serious and popular.

Again, we all know the various ways that music, like language, has divided people. On the Day of Pentecost, music—excellent music, that is—unites people. We all hear the one voice of God's power. In those moments when it is most thrilling, it feels a lot like the effects of new wine! But not just new wine, at least, not here in the Cathedral, but old wine, too. Old wine made new!

On this day, I pause to recognize that it takes a spirit-filled person, a Pentecost person, to lead, and to guide, and to support God's glory in the music of the church. It takes a Pentecost leader, a truly Spirit-filled leader and conductor and director and player. There are several such leaders and conductors in our presence this afternoon.

But the Spirit-filled leader I am referring to today, is the person we come to honor today, who, thirty-two years after beginning his ministry here, is retiring. Mr. David Fishburn.

It takes a spirit-filled person, a Pentecost person, to lead, and to guide, and to support, God's glory in the music of the church. That person is David Fishburn.

Most of us here today know about his ability as a sensitive and supportive organist. We have experienced his style and his grace. But I want to add that it takes a Spirit-filled person to minister in choirs and groups of musicians who have such quirky personalities, too! You know who you are!

Consider a Senior Canon for Music, or a Major Conductor, and all the eccentric voices and personalities of musicians. Those Senior Canons and Directors handle a lot. We recognize that challenge.

Okay. Now take that thought to another level, a deeper one. Consider the various personalities and voices and quirks and characters of those very Senior Canons and Major Conductors! Can you remember those eccentricities?

If so, then you can also imagine all that an Associate Organist has had to support! It is the Associate Organist who can handle not just the choirs, but also the choir directors! Here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, David Fishburn has been here through them all! And I certainly mean clergy, too—the clergy as well as the musicians!

David's role and ministry at the Cathedral of St. Philip has truly been spiritual.

When Jesus said, in the Gospel of John, that he was leaving this world, he said that he would send someone else, an "Advocate," he said. Of course, we take that to mean the "Holy Spirit." But those of you experienced in the Church, also have heard another word that is used there. The word "advocate" for "Holy Spirit," is really the Greek word "paraclete." Jesus said he would send a "paraclete."

Do you know what that word "paraclete" literally means? It means someone who has been "called alongside of." "Clesis" is "to be called." And "para" means alongside of. A "paraclete" is someone who has been called alongside of.

Well, for thirty-two years, David Fishburn has been the "paraclete" of the music ministry of the Cathedral of St. Philip, the person who has been called—truly called—to serve alongside of so many others. That is what true support is. And that is what the work of the Holy Spirit is.

Thank you, David, for being the paraclete, the support, the holy spirit, in all manner of ministry and love here at the Cathedral of St. Philip.

Finally, we give thanks to God today, on Pentecost Sunday, for the celebration of the gifts of so many people called here! For Wallace Marsh, Canon of the Cathedral, also departing today, and for his gifts of support and wisdom and faith. For musicians and clergy of this place who have served in years past, and even for those who will follow us.

Today, the Feast of Pentecost, is the day to recognize God's power in so many different personalities and gifts—all united, blended, harmonized, tempered, conducted, and directed, by the marvelous Holy Spirit of God.

Alleluia and Amen.