

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Pentecost Sunday

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost Sunday May 23rd 2021

Today is Pentecost Sunday where we celebrate the birth of the church. The Day of Pentecost goes back to the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which served two purposes in its ceremonial reverence. The Festival of Weeks celebrated the beginning of the harvest season. There were several burnt offerings made to God as prescribed in the detailing of each festival in the Books of the Law (Leviticus 23:15-23; Numbers 28:26-31). The Day of Pentecost in the Jewish and Christian traditions are both celebrated 50 days after Passover. The Spirit of the Lord and the Holy Spirit are both important aspects of both of these traditions. The disciples witness and fully experience Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit to come and guide them through their ministry in the form of a violent, howling, rushing wind sweeping through the people gathered. On this Day of Pentecost, we ask, "How are we restored by God? How do we restore one another through the Spirit of God?"

Let us listen and feel that Holy Spirit today. This is a prayer from Rachel Hackenberg in reverence of the Day of Pentecost. Let us pray.

*"How great you are, O God our God,
and how foolish are we to call you ours! Your power cannot be measured,
your holiness cannot be contained. Without you, we are entirely hopeless ...
with you, we are completely unsettled.*

*How to choose: between your Consuming Fire and the embers of
complacency? between your Dance of New Life and the brittle familiarity of
these bones? between your Righteous Justification and this world's systems
of injustice?*

*In the power of your glory, save us and grant us courage to draw near to
your ferocious grace. Give us strength to bear down through the labor pains
of reparation & restoration. Fill us with visions beyond our wildest dreams,
and as we dream, we will sing your highest praises if you will hold our
deepest sorrows; we will remember your promises of life if you will hold our
stories of death; we will say your name often & loosely as though drunk if
you will hold our names intentionally in your hand.*

Be fierce, O Holy God — the world needs you to be fierce, and the world needs us to be fiercely convicted by your power and grace. We dare to say that we are ready to be changed by your Spirit; we are ready. Amen.” <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/05/18/worship-words-for-pentecost-2021/>

Acts 2:1-4

The Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke are written by the same author. In fact, the author of these books fully intended them to be read in order as the Book of Acts begins with the events immediately following Christ’s resurrection and commission. All the most devout disciples are gathered from various regions throughout the Mediterranean region. Even though culturally they were there to celebrate the beginning of the harvest, this year seems different as they have all witnessed their leader be crucified and raised to new life in the past 50 days. Think of what you have done the past 50 days and imagine how heavy the disciples hearts must have been and how eager they were to be in community with one another to show love and support.

Something begins to happen. At first they just hear it, but it is the sound of a violent wind which filled the entire house where they were sitting. This is reminiscent of the same sweeping wind found in creation story of the opening chapter of Genesis and the same spirit that led the Israelites away from the Egyptians by delivering them to safety through carefully passing through the Red Sea. After they hear the Spirit, they see the Spirit in form of a flame as if this flame was somehow speaking through them. The arrival of this Divine Spirit symbolizes God’s presence and God’s judgment among the peoples as told in the stories of Exodus and through the prophets of Isaiah. Just as the Lord blessed each day of creation, each sense and experience of the disciples is followed by the Holy Spirit filling them up to do the work of the gospel. Just as God called the prophets of the Israelites to go out and proclaim the good news, the disciples here in this story have been commissioned as prophets to go forth and fill the world with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:5-13

In this next section of the story, two themes are vitally apparent which are the community the Spirit calls us to belong to and the speaking in tongues between peoples of different nations. The Book of Acts in general shares a theme of a community of believers. This theme is seen throughout the Gospel of Luke through Jesus’ ministry and continue on in the Book of

Acts with Paul and the disciple's traveling throughout various regions of the world to spread the good news. The Holy Spirit is not meant for one community or one person but is meant to be shared and experienced together as God loves all of God's creation.

The Holy Spirit is described in this story as being experienced through our senses. The people hear and see the Holy Spirit descending like a mighty wind and by the flame as they begin to speak to one another even though they do not speak each other's language. The people experienced taste and touch through the anointing of the flame as the Holy Spirit provided a sense of unity of among the community of believers. Although smell is not specifically mentioned, I am sure some type of incense is being burned or food being cooked, so this would have been assumed to the modern reader.

Place

Although later on there is a long list of countries and regions of the world in which people are from, the people in the story gathered together with the 11 disciples are considered Galilean. Galilee is where a large portion of Jesus' ministry takes place, which makes sense why people consider them Galilean, even though culturally and ethnically they may consider themselves something else. It is important to note as well that Galileans were looked down upon. They were seen as uneducated, simple people and backwards in their thinking and perspective of the world. Galilee was a strategic area for the Roman Empire located in between Syria and Egypt, but the Jews there were known for their anti-empire sentiment keeping to their traditions of old and refusing to assimilate to the Roman way. The Galileans were seen as trouble, which is no surprise later on in the story onlookers laugh at the Galileans and accuse them of being drunk.

There is a long list of countries listed to speak to the diversity of peoples gathered in this place as Jesus' who belonged to the community of devout disciples. The people gathered were from as far north as modern day Turkey and Armenia, as far west as Rome centered around the Italian peninsula, as far east as the ancient dwellings of Iraq and Iran, and as far south as Northern Africa in Libya, Egypt, and modern day Saudi Arabia. All of these people were determining what would be the future of the church, the future which God blesses by sending down the Holy Spirit among the people to fill them with the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Just like in the stories of Advent, Lent, and many other stories of God directly intervening in the lives of the common folk, the people are surprised and bewildered. They are amazed and perplexed as they listen to one another, communicate to each other, and begin discerning together how to honor

Jesus' legacy and how to continue Jesus' ministry of spreading the good news to the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, and broken-hearted of the world.

Acts 2:14-21

Being accused of being a bunch of drunks in the morning of Pentecost, Peter jumps up to defend the people by interpreting the events taking place by quoting a section from the prophet Joel who spoke to the Northern Kingdoms under the Assyrian Empire. This is one of seven sermons Peter will give in the Book of Acts. Peter begins making a defense of their faith to the people gathered around laughing and jeering at them. Peter makes his case by understanding the Holy Spirit as God's blessing and Jesus' promise and by seeing this as an opportunity to start afresh the work they had done with Jesus because through the transformation of the gospel they had new life through Christ.

Peter is a symbol of the new prophet and the new vision of the future of Jesus' ministry. He is compared to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible by his interpretation of the events they have all witnessed. Peter quotes Joel 2:28-31 and begins his defense of his faith by saying this, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18 NRSV). The Spirit in which they have witnessed has come to break down all the class barriers, gender glass ceilings, break down all barriers separating us by age and generational divides, and the Spirit will break down the racial tensions which keep us from uniting as one body of Christ. Peter does make one interesting change to the manuscript he quotes in Joel.

In Joel 2:28, Joel begins this section by saying "afterword" as opposed to "in the last days." Although Peter's message is a little more eschatological in nature, Joel's use of the word afterword certainly conveys the full message Peter was attempting to interpret. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate as Jesus had called it, has come to guide the people just as Jesus had done for them as their friend and mentor. Jesus came to restore creation and reconnect humankind to the values of the good news and the action of the gospel. The Spirit comes to restore all of creation with the Spirit of the Lord. In the creation story found in Genesis 2, humans do not become alive until God breathes new life into them, thus, granting them life. The church did not have life until God came down through the Holy Spirit and breathed life into

the church. Just as the prophet Joel proclaimed and Peter quotes here, empires will crumble in this world, but the Kingdom of God will endure forever. Let us feel, see, hear, taste, smell, and be filled by the Holy Spirit this Pentecost!

The Spirit is sent to shake up the world and stir us from the doldrums of life and our apathy towards restorative justice. The Spirit moves us to celebrate our sacredness together in our resistance for love for the betterment of our neighbors and their neighbors' neighbors. This is the beginning of the church. How will the church respond today as the Spirit breathes new life into us? Will we be moved to action and compassion for our neighbors in the Gaza Strip, in Palestine where many of the stories we read on Sunday originate from. Will we be moved to empathy and equity as we aid and advocate for our neighbors on the front lines of picket fences and bullhorns in hand as they demand a living, equitable wage in the name of justice? Will we be moved to restoration and healing as we are empowered to care for our neighbors who live on the streets, suffer from mental health issues, and are unemployed in an economy wrecked by Covid and being taken advantage of by the greedy and power hungry? Where will the Spirit call us and will we go?

We are an Easter People but we are a Pentecostal Church. We may feel as if we have seen the end times themselves with onslaught of catastrophes Covid-19 brought on and the many on-going disasters and tragedies of our world, but the Spirit has blessed us with the summons of restoring the world by building the kingdom of God here and now. We stand in our brokenness, but we will rise from the ashes through the restorative powers of the gospel as a people united in solidarity to resist the evils of this world. Pentecost is our reminder the world needs this reclaiming of its spirit and, simultaneously, it must heal. Pentecost is our reminder the world needs the restorative, transformative gospel the good news provides as we spread the principles of hope, love, joy, and peace throughout the world to every nation. May we respond to that mighty rushing wind here in the Northern plains of Montana. Amen.