

Faith Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, May 31, 2020
Day of Pentecost



Call to Worship

P) As they gathered to hear the Word proclaimed on that first Pentecost,

C) so too, we gather today to celebrate the coming of the Spirit.

P) Awe came upon the community of faith as they encountered the living Lord.

C) Make us aware, Holy Spirit, of the majesty and awe of God's continuing presence.

P) Let us worship God!

(<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/2019-pentecost-worship-resources/>)

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

O God, on this day You open the hearts of Your faithful people by sending into us Your Holy Spirit. Direct us by the light of that Spirit, that we may have a right judgment in all things and rejoice at all times in Your peace, through Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.** (from the Day of Pentecost, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Readings and Psalm

**I am sharing the First Reading with you today as it is the basis of my sermon.

• **Acts 2:1-21**

Filled with the Spirit to tell God's deeds

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose,

for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷In 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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

- **Psalm 104:24-34, 35b** *Send forth Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth. (Ps. 104:30)*
- **1 Corinthians 12:3b-13** *Varieties of gifts from the same Spirit*
- **John 20:19-23** *The Spirit poured out*

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on this Day of Pentecost. Amen.

It has been an exhausting time, this whole pandemic thing. As I pastor, I can tell you I've spent many nights wondering what to do next and worrying if I am doing enough. What the best way is to keep ministering to my church families and to the communities surrounding them. What new way I can tell them how much I'm praying for them and hope they hear it. What new technique I can use to reach out to not only our members but others who may visit our resources and hear – maybe even for the very first time – that God loves us all.

And then this week we see blatant acts of injustice towards God's people. The same people God calls us to love. Our neighbor. Though we may be quick to point out a particular situation from this week, it is an ongoing struggle that our country and our world has faced in what seems like forever. Granted, we are each entitled to our own opinion on any and every topic. But our underlying question should always be: Is this how God wants us to treat one another and how we show our love for each other?

It is in this state of exhaustion, anger, frustration, and deep sadness that I preach to you today. That probably isn't a very uplifting place to start.

I chose to share the First Reading from Acts rather than the gospel from John because I appreciate hearing the passage from Acts on Pentecost Sunday.

For a brief point of history: The Jewish people from all over the countryside would gather to celebrate a holiday known as the “Festival of Weeks”. This was a harvest festival, a time when the Israelites would celebrate the generosity of God, shown in a successful harvest. It was customary that each farmer would bring their *first fruits* – the first ripe samples from their fields – and give them as an offering of thanksgiving in the Temple.

The Festival of Weeks happened fifty days after the Passover. This festival, called Pentecost, was derived from the Greek word meaning “fiftieth day.” And so, it is here where we find the disciples gathered together in one place – today on Pentecost Sunday.

Our scripture says, “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:2-4)

That tired, almost-defeated, weary soul of mine leaped with joy when I read these words! I get goose-bumps thinking of how overwhelming it must have been to be able to understand each other even though they were speaking in different languages, in their native tongue! Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear that today? Instead of being divided by political rhetoric, or racism or social injustice, or feast or famine, wouldn't it be wonderful to talk with one another and listen to one another despite all our differences? Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear the voices of “the other” instead of us raising our voices to be heard above all else? Wouldn't it be wonderful for the Holy Spirit to say, "Hey, I got this, these are the words I want you to say!"? Truthfully, I believe the Holy Spirit does tell us that but how often do we listen?

We live in a divisive state and by that, I'm not referring to just the State of Michigan. This has only been exemplified by the pandemic. Our physical, emotional, spiritual, and financial being has been upended. Any sense of normalcy went out the window several months ago. And we have no idea when normalcy will return or what it will even look like.

Yet today, Pentecost Sunday, we find reason to celebrate. Today many mark as the birthday of the church. It is the day the apostles came together for the first time without Jesus among them after His crucifixion and death, His burial and His ascension.

A sound came from heaven like the rush of a violent wind! Divided tongues, as of fire, rested on each of them. It was then that the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, were sent out to preach and teach the gospel and to baptize. They took Jesus' message and, with the gift of the Holy Spirit filling their hearts and their voices, began to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ first to the crowd that had gathered. Later on, in Acts 2, we hear that about three thousand persons were baptized who had welcomed the message the apostles shared that day alone. That was the first event of the mass evangelism movement. That was the beginning, the birth, of the church. What a joyous celebration that was then as that is today!

We continue sharing that same message today. As Christians, we are forever called to carry Christ's message out into this world. We don't do this on our own. The Holy Spirit gives each of us the ability to do this with the gifts we are given.

St. Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 12: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

This world, though filled with divisiveness and hatred, pain and suffering, begs for change. We must allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and our voices so that we, too might somehow hear and understand each other across all that divides us. There is no greater time for this than the present. There is no greater need for this than right now.

The world is depending on us. Be the change you want to see in the world. Make this the new church of today! Because, especially for those who suffer, we must bring peace. We must bring love. We must teach the saving grace of Jesus Christ to our sisters and brothers everywhere. For if we don't do it, who will?

Amen.

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

We call on Your spirit of unity, giving thanks for our different vocations. Activate and utilize the diverse gifts present in Your church, that they reveal Your love for all.

We call on Your spirit of life, present in air, wind, humidity, storms, and oxygen in our atmosphere, breathing energy into all things. Heal with Your breath the whole creation, especially those who struggle to breathe due to air pollution.

We call on Your spirit of righteousness. Wherever we as a people are divided, unite us. Wherever we are prideful, humble us. Give each one of us a heart for justice and empathy.

We call on Your spirit of healing. Bless nurses, doctors, midwives, chaplains, counselors, and hospice workers as they care for those in need. We pray for all who long for comfort. Bring healing to all affected by the coronavirus. Give comfort and relief to all who suffer in any way; in body, mind, and spirit,

especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices....(please name your prayer concerns).

We call on Your spirit of friendship. As Elizabeth welcomed Mary to her home, give us a spirit of welcome to those whom we meet in this congregation and this community. Surprise us daily with unexpected grace, that we rejoice in every blessing You send.

We call on Your spirit of hope. As You have led Your saints in all times and places, stir in us the desire to follow their example, leading us from death to new life in You.

With bold confidence in Your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into Your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (prayers from the Day of Pentecost, © sundaysandseasons 2020)

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to pray...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer

God of every good gift and source of abundance, take these our gifts and tithes and use them in Your service. Multiply them by the power of Your Holy Spirit that they may kindle faith where it lies dormant, spark compassion for those whose lives are even now being formed and ignite us to action on behalf of the most vulnerable. In Your name we pray, **Amen.**

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Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Be filled with the Spirit!

Thanks be to God!