

Day of Pentecost, May 20, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104; Romans 8:22-27, John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15.

Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] 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:

¹⁷‘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.

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.’ ”

Gospel: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

[Jesus said,] ²⁶“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

^{16:4b}“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The disciples were frightened, worried and huddled in a small room. Where do we go from here? What does the future hold? Sound familiar? And, why, they wondered, doesn't Jesus show up here again?

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“What’s that?” said Simon. “The wind,” answered Andrew. “It sounds like a gale,” said Matthew, “but nothing outside is blowing. It seems to be IN HERE!”

And it was. It was a wind that drove the disciples out of the locked upper room. In a moment, Simon Peter was outside speaking to a group of people. Then Andrew was nearby, speaking in a different language to ten others. And Matthew followed, on fire with excitement, telling fifteen others in their own language the story of Jesus. James and John were outside now too, talking in goodness knows what language and people were listening!

“God has raised Jesus from the dead. We are his witnesses. ... Know that God has given Jesus to us as our Lord and our Christ!”

“Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” preached Peter, Matthew, James, John and all the others.

And thousands of people lined up to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was just as Jesus had promised, “Lo, I am with you always until the end of the world.”

Mary and the other Mary hugged each other. Laughed for the first time in weeks. Helped hold the children for their baptisms. Remembered the words of the prophet Joel, “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”

The Holy Spirit entered the souls, hearts and minds of the ancient people.

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This morning we 21st century disciples gather in a room where we also expect Jesus to show up. We too wonder what the future will hold. But the Spirit is IN HERE too. Where do we go from here? Some of us are worried about our personal futures. Some of us have dreams and visions for this congregation’s future. Just an hour ago we voted to call Pastor R. to serve in this place. Now we wait. We wait for him to bring his family to see our town; we wait for their discernment to accept or to turn back our call.

Times like this are both exciting and challenging. Lots of “what if?” questions. And lots of opportunity for the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Sometimes we are amazed and surprised when we hear the story of the first Pentecost, how the early church was birthed, how people heard the story of Jesus in their own languages.

But, here’s the thing. We always hear the spirit of God in our own language.

The language of Jesus becomes relevant to each of us in the way we need to hear it.

A sick person may hear the words of healing. An activist may hear words of justice. A troubled person may hear words of peace. A criminal may hear words about repentance and forgiveness. A married person may hear words about the value of relationship. We each hear whatever we are capable of hearing and responding to.

Pastor R. will hear the results of today’s meeting differently from his wife and son. The Call Committee will hear the results differently from those who have not been involved -- except for prayer -- with the call process.

But, we have been praying. We trust that the Holy Spirit, whom we invoke with great passion today, is here, is in the process, is in our prayers, and is busy helping us have faith in God's amazing grace.

We cling to the verse written above our memorial wall: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8

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What happens when the Holy Spirit comes?

Well, some sing, some stop worrying, some phone their friends or newer church members, some are baptized, some think a little bit differently about things.

One person after another falls to his knees, her knees; confronts the loss and sin and lack in his life, her life; hears the words of Gospel and forgiveness; rises filled with the Holy Spirit; and is given the words and the love to reach out to the next person.

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I once read a slogan that said, "Open doors you never knew existed."

I'm not exactly sure what that slogan means, but it sticks in my mind when I think of Pentecost. At first, the disciples in the early church couldn't believe Jesus' resurrection. I don't think they realized how locked tight their minds and hearts were – locked as tightly as the door to their upper room where they hid in fear. Maybe we don't realize when our minds or hearts are locked up that tight either.

The disciples were pushed – blown – driven right through those locked doors into the streets where people were willing to listen to them. There are doors to this church, doors to our minds, that the Holy Spirit is willing to blow open as well. To drive us into the world with the news of Christ. To compel us – through doors we never knew existed – to live the Gospel. To preach by our actions, our generosity, our compassion. To forgive and be forgiven. To share another's burdens – of illness, of worry, of fear, of hunger, of homelessness.

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What happens to the person who says, "I cannot believe this?"

Well, Martin Luther believed that no one could believe this. So he said, in his explanation to the third part of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe that I cannot believe..."

No one could believe that Jesus was God's son, that one's sins could be forgiven, that the alienation with the world, the self, and the other could be overcome. EXCEPT – and WHEN the Holy Spirit calls, gathers and enlightens! And opens doors to our lives and rushes in and drives us forward in faith and hope and love.

We get tired....to be sure. We get discouraged....to be sure. But the Spirit doesn't sleep. The Spirit grants us rest and then helps us get up once again.

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The Spirit has ways of working in people that we cannot and will never comprehend. Perhaps that's the joy of Pentecost. Someone has said the "proof" of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit is not the empty tomb, but the empty upper room. The room of fear and hesitance, unfaith and inability to believe – emptied into the streets of Jerusalem and across the Roman Empire and on to the new world. To us here today.

Now that joyful work was not easy. The apostles encountered all manner of struggles and challenges and most died for their witness. But we can thank them for the church and the faith that sustain us today.

The Holy Spirit doesn't solve our problems, but invites us to see possibilities we would not have seen otherwise. We might have bouts of real fear, but the Spirit grants us courage to move forward. We may feel insecure and vulnerable, but the Spirit promises God's presence. We might want to bury our heads in the sand of complacency, but the Spirit drives us out of the doors of this building into the community.

The Holy Spirit helps us see possibilities where others see only problems and grants us the strength and energy to work with both confidence and joy to the benefit of those around us. We will keep this in mind during this week of informational meetings about the Affordable Housing project and next Sunday when we vote on its business plan.

Jesus promised that the Spirit would drive us into all truth. And into abundant life.

That is our prayer for this congregation, for everyone of us, for Pastor R. and his family, and for our community. Come, Holy Spirit! In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.