

(Pentecost Sunday)

Joel 2:28-29

“I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your children will prophesy, Your elderly will dream, your youth will see visions. I’ll even pour out my Spirit on the servants, men and women both.”

Acts 2:1-4

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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.”

Pentecost is a Jewish religious holiday, one of three pilgrimage holidays. “It is referred to as ‘Shavuot’ in Hebrew, though at one time, Greek speaking Jews called it Pentecost. It is the feast of weeks celebrated seven weeks after the second Passover seder. Although Shavuot begins as an ancient wheat festival (Exodus 43:22), the holiday has been identified since biblical times with the giving of the Torah or Law of Moses on Mount Sinai.” (myjewishlearning.com)

The writer of Acts is considered to be Luke, who wrote in Greek, thus in our reading this morning, the Greek word Pentecost is used instead of the Hebrew word, Shavuot.

So it is the Festival of Shavuot or Pentecost, we are told by the writer of Acts.

Jesus, crucified, dead, buried and resurrected, had now left them, ascending into “the heavens”. Ascension stories were fairly common in the time of Jesus, especially in the Greco-Roman, early Jewish, and early Christian literary sources. They tended to lift up the noteworthy or divine nature of an individual or one who had prophetic or revelatory gifts who went on a cosmic journey to learn divine secrets.

In our Christian liturgical calendar, Ascension Sunday was last week. Before Jesus ascended, he promised that his followers would not be left alone. He would send the Advocate or Spirit. But for now, they are left alone, sheltering in a safe comfortable place.

Their whole identity had been shaped by their relationship with the One who promised to be with them, always, and forever. But that is now a past memory. All they thought about was tied to their past relationship with Jesus, was dead, and yes, raised, and as the story unfolds in the first chapter of Acts,

has ascended into the heavens. Now what? Where do they go from here? They want to cling to the past, to what once was, and can see no way into the future.

Suddenly, the Spirit of God blows through their safe space, startling them, surprising them, and filling them with - terror? Yes, but so much more, with a new day, a new dream, a new vision of living together in God's global community!

As the Prophet Joel says: **"I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your children will prophesy, Your elderly will dream, your youth will see visions. I'll even pour out my Spirit on the servants, men and women both."**

The story of Pentecost moves the disciples out of the past, into a new, unknown future.

The Spirit drives them out into the neighborhoods, among the diverse population, even those foreign to them, who speak various languages!

There, in the streets, among the people, they begin to witness, speaking a new language, offering up a new vision. A vision of God's new way of living as a community of people from different places and cultures, speaking different languages, and different faith traditions, learning to be as one!

For us, Pentecost has become the story of the birth of the "Church". This birth takes place, not in a place defined by walls, but outside in the streets, in the community among all the people of the world.

Today, we in the "Church," tend to celebrate Pentecost Sunday inside the safety of our sanctuaries.

Many churches decorate sanctuaries with the liturgical color red. Banners, with the symbols of Spirit (Doves, Fire, Wind, Water) hang from our walls. Bouquets of red balloons replace flowers. Worshipers add to the color-fest by wearing red clothing. Afterwards, many congregations celebrate with a birthday cake! We have done that in the past.

But this pandemic has brought changes, while some churches are returning to the way things used to be in worship and celebrated on liturgical holidays others have seen this as new Pentecost moment, embracing the Spirit's leading out of the past and into a new future.

Like those first followers of Jesus, the pandemic forced us out of the safety and comfort of our sanctuaries and the way we had grown accustomed to doing things, moving us out into the larger world, where we have been forced to discover, new, creative, and meaningful ways to be the Church?

Perhaps the Spirit has, through this Pandemic time, helped us reshape our identity, giving us a new understanding of what it means to be the people of God?

While our church buildings have long identified who we are, and have provided space for many important ministries, the maintenance and upkeep, have drained much of our resources.

This Pandemic time, Pandemic Pentecost, is pushing us to examine what the future of the Church and church buildings might be with the use of live-streaming, Zoom meetings, and other technology. Some are beginning to ask, as some businesses have, do we need a building, and if so, do we really need all this space and overhead costs?

Staci's congregation, Lakeview Moravian, and the people of Zion Lutheran, with their pastor, Pat Siegler, prayerfully considered this, and decided to combine their congregations into one new ministry under one roof, taking on a new name. Lake Edge UCC and Christ the Solid Rock, a historic black congregation come together under one roof. New faith communities are being formed online. Some are selling their buildings to developers, renting back space to worship and provide ministry.

The story of that Pentecost is a reminder to us that God's Spirit is always leading us into new ways of being in ministry as faith communities, calling us out of how we have done things in the past.

God is always doing a new thing. The Spirit blows where it will, driving believers from behind the locked doors of their fears and status quo, out into the world, to be creative, innovative, imagining the church out in the world beyond walls in new ways.

That is, for me, the real story of Pentecost, which is being lived out even now, among the Churches and people. Not in our sanctuaries that we have loved, but out in the world, where God is to be found anew.

A mighty wind is still blowing, calling us to leave the safety and comfort of our known lives and venture out into the streets and into the world to proclaim this, God's good news, in every language, by speaking the One universal language and that is the powerful, redemptive, reconciling and healing language of Love!

Amen.

This Grace That Scorches Us: A Blessing for Pentecost Day
Jan Richardson

Here's one thing
you must understand
about this blessing:

it is not

for you alone.

It is stubborn
about this.

Do not even try
to lay hold of it
if you are by yourself,
thinking you can carry it
on your own.

To bear this blessing,
you must first take yourself
to a place where everyone
does not look like you
or think like you,
a place where they do not
believe precisely as you believe,
where their thoughts
and ideas and gestures
are not exact echoes
of your own.

Bring your sorrow.

Bring your grief.

Bring your fear.

Bring your weariness,
your pain,
your disgust at how broken
the world is,
how fractured,
how fragmented
by its fighting,
its wars,
its hungers,
its penchant for power,
its ceaseless repetition
of the history it refuses
to rise above.

I will not tell you
this blessing will fix all that.

But in the place
where you have gathered,
wait.

Watch.

Listen.

Lay aside your inability
to be surprised,
your resistance to what you

do not understand.
See then whether this blessing
turns to flame on your tongue,
sets you to speaking
what you cannot fathom
or opens your ear
to a language
beyond your imagining
that comes as a knowing
in your bones,
a clarity
in your heart
that tells you
this is the reason
we were made:
for this ache
that finally opens us,
for this struggle,
this grace
that scorches us
toward one another
and into
the blazing day.