

Pastor Liz's Sermon for Pentecost Sunday - June 8, 2025

The Day of Pentecost is not the first time that we've heard from the Holy Spirit for the Spirit has always been present. In the beginning, the Spirit, participating in creation, moves over the face of the waters, breathing life into humanity and all other creatures. Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the Spirit comes upon certain individuals - judges, warriors and prophets - for different reasons and purposes. David declared that *"the Spirit of the Lord spoke to me, and his word was on my tongue"* (2 Samuel 23:2). Likewise, Ezekiel reported that *"the Spirit entered me when he spoke to me"* (Ezekiel 2: 2) The Spirit inspired Isaiah to prophecy: *"The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him"* (Isaiah 11: 2), God's Chosen One, the Messiah, bearing the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord, joy in God's presence.

From the very beginning of Luke's gospel, the Spirit continues to be at work in the lives of individuals. The angel tells Zachariah that his wife Eliabeth will give birth to a son who will be named John and he will *"be filled with the Holy Spirit"* to prepare the way of the Lord (Luke 1: 15) In the same way the angel comes to Mary announcing that *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you...therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."* (Luke 1: 35) At Jesus' baptism by John, the *"Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove..."* (Luke 3: 21) And later, Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah as he is seated in the synagogue, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (Luke 4: 18, 21) The Spirit has continued to come, through time, to certain individuals for specific reasons and purposes - until the Day of Pentecost, that is.

At our Bible study this past Thursday, we imagined what it must have felt and sounded like when the Spirit was being poured out on his followers, as Jesus had promised. The eleven disciples along with Jesus' mother, Mary, the other women and Jesus' brothers have returned to the upper room to wait, as Jesus had instructed them, for the coming of the Spirit. Matthias is selected to take Judas' place. And as Jesus promised, the Spirit did come, not just to one individual as before, but to everyone gathered, men and women, and the Spirit did not come quietly. If you have ever been in Saskatchewan when a plough wind blew through, you know the sound of a mighty wind, strong gusts that blow horizontally along the ground with a deafening sound as they stir up anything in its path. Imagine such a sound filling the house. And then flames appearing, hovering over the heads of each

person, twisting and leaping, splitting and coming together over and over again, mesmerizing like the flames that shoot skywards from a bonfire. And everyone begins speaking in different languages. This is no gentle inbreaking of the Spirit as we see depicted in static artwork, or in the image of a descending white dove. No - this is an explosive, chaotic cacophony of sight and sounds. But the Spirit isn't just around those disciples, it isn't just above them, it is in them. They were filled with it! Tongues of fire aren't only above them. Their own tongues are loosed and filled with other languages. Here are these very common, countrified folk from the Galilee region - fishermen, farmers, housewives, mothers. And suddenly they are speaking as a global village. The Spirit moves them outwards. It can't be contained within an exclusive community. It's expansive, it's wild and can't be harnessed.

Now imagine people outside on the street, stopping in bewilderment, taken aback by what they were hearing. Think how quickly a large crowd of diverse folk gathers. They are devout Jews from all the scattered Jewish settlements around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea - all those lands we try our best to pronounce on Pentecost Sunday. Having fled after the Roman conquest, they had adopted the languages of their new homes. Now, having returned to live in Jerusalem, they are using whatever little Aramaic they know to make their way.

But here's the thing; all these diverse people are hearing Jesus' followers talking about God's mighty works - in their own language - much like this woman describes her experience in a foreign land. *"I'd been there for a week," she writes, "and I didn't speak the language or understand it. For several days, my ears had been in a sea of gibberish, random sounds that I couldn't understand. Then, in an instant of clarity, I heard English from the other end of the platform. It was like a beam of light, piercing through all other sounds, straight to my ear. English, no less. My native language. It was a homing beacon, sharpening my senses to its signal. I felt every molecule in my body relax as I focused on the voice and understood the words."*

How powerful to hear of God's mighty works in one's own language! What greater divine deeds are there than those of Jesus! Jesus' followers are bearing witness to the power of the divine light no darkness can overcome. They are telling the story of Jesus' power of life over death. They are voicing the healing power of his forgiveness over sin. They are testifying to the power of love over hate, the power of hope over despair, the power of joy over sadness.

What is new here as the Spirit is poured out? The Holy Spirit is being received by everyone - women and men - rather than by specific individuals. God's Spirit is among all people, all social classes, all races, all genders, all cultures, all backgrounds. There is no partiality! That's the new thing! The people of God are a people of the Holy Spirit, of God's own Spirit dwelling within them as prophesized by Joel. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh. All expectation of who is going to receive the Spirit is completely blurred. As Peter preaches Jesus crucified, dead, risen and ascended, the hearts of those listening are turned. Peter calls them to repentance, to be baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the gift of the Spirit. *"For the promise," he says, "is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."* (Acts 2: 39)

The Spirit impels the twelve and Jesus' followers out into the street as his witnesses starting *"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."* (Luke 1:8) Like the wind itself, the Spirit is unpredictable. It blows where it wills and that very day, some 3,000 heard and were baptized, joining together, devoting *"themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* (Acts 2: 42) As we read further on in Acts, we are introduced to the many times in which the Spirit mobilizes Jesus' followers and inaugurates new directions for ministry and community. The Spirit continues to nudge believers toward new horizons. Peter and John preach powerfully; Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian faith, is filled with wisdom as he speaks; Philip witnesses to Jesus in Samaria and later teaches the Ethiopian official the good news and baptizes him; Ananias is sent to the persecutor Saul to testify to Jesus so that Saul might regain his sight and be filled with the Spirit. Peter baptizes the Roman centurion Cornelius, and the Spirit is poured out on this gentile and his household. Likewise, Barnabas witnesses to the Greeks in Antioch. So begins the mission to the Gentiles. Imagine the number of people who heard the good news of Jesus Christ but are unknown, who are not identified in the Book of Acts.

What is clear is that the Holy Spirit has propelled these witnesses of the gospel out into the world. Not one, not one of these, happens in a religious setting or behind the closed doors of a church building. The Holy Spirit sends the apostles out and in being sent out they encounter others and through their conversations and witness people are moved to be baptized because they desire to participate in the grace-filled, merciful, loving and restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

God's Spirit continues to create unity in diversity today. Across our divided world, the Spirit works to build bridges, create understanding, and form unlikely communities of faith. Rather than eliminating differences, the Spirit helps us hear each other more clearly, speak across divides more effectively, and discover unity that transcends division. The Spirit isn't constrained to one Sunday's focus. By no means! The Spirit is continuously moving, blowing where it will, creating unity by transforming diversity into a gift for the whole community. The Spirit empowers us to live into that unity, to participate in what the Spirit is creating. The Spirit surprises and flummoxes and disrupts and bewilders us but always pushes us out beyond ourselves into the world, maybe not according to our timing or our liking, but consistently and always.

Christian theologian Henri Nouwen writes that left to ourselves, we are powerless. But through the Holy Spirit, what was impossible is realized. He writes: *"The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to his followers, is the great gift of God. Without the Spirit of Jesus we can do nothing, but in and through his Spirit we can live free, joyful, and courageous lives. We cannot pray, but the Spirit of Christ can pray in us. We cannot create peace and joy, but the Spirit of Christ can fill us with a peace and joy that is not of this world. We cannot break through the many barriers that divide races, sexes, and nations, but the Spirit of Christ unites all people in the all-embracing love of God. The Spirit of Christ burns away our many fears and anxieties and sets us free to move wherever we are sent."*

May the Spirit so move us and direct us in the path in which we are to go.

Amen and Amen

Blessing

May the Spirit of truth lead you into all truth, giving you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and boldness to proclaim the wonderful works of God; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.

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