

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

May 23, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

Acts 2:1-21

2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 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. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But 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. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, 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.

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

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

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

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

Prayer & Sermon

God of love and new life,

Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

Happy Pentecost everyone! Although it isn't one of the holidays we are most familiar with, Pentecost is arguably the biggest Christian holiday of the year. Fun fact: It is the only of the Christian holidays that we celebrate that is named in the Bible. It is often said that the Pentecost we read about in Acts 2 this morning is the Christian Church's birthday as it marks the start of the church's mission of spreading the Good News of the Gospel to all. I am unsure what ways you have celebrated in our churches through the years, but one of the most common ways we commemorate Pentecost is with the color red and with flame, to remind us of those tongues of fire mentioned in the scripture. It is those same flames that inspired the United Methodist church logo, the cross and flame.

That said, Pentecost was first and still is a Jewish holiday. It was a gathering of all people, including non-Jewish neighbors and anyone else around, brought together to remember the giving of the law or the Torah at Mount Sinai as well as celebrate the end of the Spring Harvest. It was for this celebration that the Disciples and other followers of Jesus gathered together. They are now on their own, after Jesus ascended to be with his Father in heaven, but are still outcasts from Jewish and Roman society and are likely facing persecution to some degree. So, these Jesus followers gathered for Pentecost just among themselves inside a house. Just like at the Last Supper when Jesus gave the Passover gathering new meaning, God uses this pre-existing gathering of the leaders of the new Jesus movement and brings new meaning to the Pentecost celebration. Jewish Pentecost celebrates the giving of the law because that law, the Torah, was actually a way for the many diverse Jewish people to be united under one way of living. The gift of the Torah united the people. Now, in this moment recorded in Acts 2, we are told of the gift of the Holy Spirit uniting all of God's people in a new way.

Today, we continue to celebrate Pentecost as a celebration of the Holy Spirit being released among all the people of the world. Acts 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit works through all peoples, not just Jewish people, not just those that speak Hebrew or Aramaic, but all around the world, people of any language, any race, any nationality, any class. The Spirit moves and works as the Spirit decides and is not stopped by any barriers we construct in society.

One of the things that confused me a bit about Pentecost as I started thinking about it to actually preach on it, is that we talk about Pentecost as the coming or gift of the Holy Spirit as if the Holy Spirit did not exist until that moment that the wind picked up and the tongues of fire came licking.// **But**, we hear about the Spirit of God in Jesus's Baptism at the beginning of a couple of the Gospels, we hear about the Spirit of God and the breath of God throughout the Old Testament. The prophecies and visions in the Old and

New Testament are attributed to the Spirit. And, we claim our God has always been our triune God, three-in-one. So, did the Spirit blip into existence for that specific Pentecost celebration or has been here all along? And if she has been around all along, what's new to celebrate on Pentecost then???

Well, as is often the case when a question arises for us early in the passage, as we keep reading, we are given an answer. First, the obvious new thing is the whole speaking unknown languages to each other and hearing others speak to them in their own language. The barrier of language being obliterated among those people is obviously a new and miraculous thing. Though we may not have this experience in specifics today, though it would be handy if that part had stuck around, the significance of that moment is evidenced today as Christians worship in all sorts of languages around the world and as each of us are able to put our faith into words for others to hear and be inspired by, just as important even when it is in our own language. The other new thing that is worth celebrating about the Holy Spirit is shared by Peter in the passage. As all those gathered experience this wild language meshing, many start asking in bewilderment, "What does this mean?" Peter responds, not directly addressing the language piece, but about the event as a whole by sharing a prophecy from the book of Joel, "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. ... 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Peter sees that moment he was in as the moment the Spirit was poured out "upon all flesh," upon all people, which the prophecy clarifies that all means all: young and old, slave and free, men and women, will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit and will receive the gifts of the Spirit.

The prophecy in Joel also speaks to another important piece of the coming of the Spirit. Now that the Spirit is poured out on and among all, what does the Spirit do exactly? The prophecy mentions it briefly, "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, / and your young men shall see visions, / and your old men shall dream dreams." When I think of those who prophesy and see visions, I think of the classic image of the old, wise sage: their hair is usually white, their wrinkles are usually plentiful. Think Yoda in Star Wars or Dumbledore in Harry Potter or the Fairy Godmother in Cinderella. Or in the Bible: we always depict Moses and Noah and Elijah and all those prophets that had visions as old men with beards. The one who has visions or seems to see and know more than they should are always old! And when I think of dreamers, that also easily brings an image to mind. Those that are labelled dreamers are almost always the young and naive ones, those who haven't been knocked down by life experience. As a Millennial, I know I have heard that label used about my generation and GenZ plenty. Yet here in Acts 2, quoted from Joel, the Spirit being poured out on all peoples, causes the sons and daughters and the young to prophesy and see visions and the old to dream dreams. This line that is easy to skim over speaks to what the Spirit does within and among us, why it is a big deal that everyone now has access to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit shakes things up, flips the status quo, and empowers, even the unexpected people, to live out the hopes of God for us and the world.

The Holy Spirit is not a passive gift to us, it is not meant as a support for us to stay exactly the same or to just accept the feelings of love, grace, and support and do nothing with them. It is all too easy to rely on what the Holy Spirit does for us and not think about what we can do **with** the Spirit. We are not truly accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit and allowing the Holy Spirit into our hearts and minds if we stay exactly the same as we were before. The first Christian Pentecost, the Holy Spirit roared in among all the people and there was an immediate noticeable change as they spoke in languages they never knew and the crowds understood what they were saying like it was in their own language. This is a very obvious and tangible change. Though the Holy Spirit doesn't always work in that obvious of ways. I can attest that I have yet to see tongues of flame or have suddenly spoken a language that I never knew. But, I have had moments that I have somehow had the right thing to say come through my mind in the moment I needed it to help someone else feel more connected to God or bring them comfort. We may not start a whole new religion or denomination right here as those Disciples went on to do, but we have seen the movement of the Spirit among us sparking new things. This past year is one that we have really had to rely on the Spirit to help us be creative and be open to new ways of doing church. In our churches we have seen the Spirit at work keeping us united while worshipping from our homes. We have seen the Spirit with our new Christmas Eve event out in the square, and with the refreshing of familiar traditions like those of Holy Week and Advent. I know it is the movement of the Spirit that has spurred us to try the new Wednesday evening service and I trust that if the winds of the Spirit are blowing us there that the service will have an important impact on at least one person. We have been feeling the Spirit among the Being Brave group as we have come to concrete ideas for how to share God's love and grace in tangible ways in our community. Today as we baptize our four babies we are celebrating the grace of God that is already and will continue to pour out on them through the nudging and growth that the Spirit will bring them. Most of those were ways that we experience the Holy Spirit together as the church. But, it is important to remember that we don't just encounter the Holy Spirit on Sunday mornings or during church meetings or while gathered together. The Holy Spirit comes to each of us, breathing new life into our hearts and minds, shaking us up where we need to get out of old habits, nudging us toward where we need to grow, and igniting us with the passion and bravery to step up or step out and do something to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Just as the Holy Spirit blew into that house where the Disciples were gathered with violent wind and chaotic fire making quite the scene, when we truly open ourselves to listen for what the Spirit has for us, we ought to be ready to be led in unexpected directions and perhaps even down roads that we don't know exactly where they lead. Are we like those of the first church willing to follow the call of the Spirit no matter how bewildering and unfamiliar it is? Do you allow the Spirit to lead you, or relegate the Spirit to the backseat? Even though she can be quite the backseat driver. Are we willing to be led by the Spirit and trust the Spirit even without knowing the destination? Pentecost is a day to remember where the Spirit has moved throughout the life story of the church, reflect on when and where we have felt the Spirit moving, and refresh and recommit to our relationship with the Spirit. May we all let the words of our opening song be our personal response: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Let us pray.

O Lord, Knock us off our seats, with the wind of your Holy Spirit. Don't let us just sit back and rest as though nothing important was happening. Remind us that you have come to bless and prepare us for your service. Now is the time of proclamation and celebration! Now is the birth of your church, not as an exercise in futility, but as a dynamic group of people who know you and love you as you know and love each of us. Flame up our hearts! Make us so joyful that we find it difficult to sit back and watch. We want to be part of your healing love and mercy. We want to be people who bear the word that your love for us is eternal; that Jesus Christ, our Savior, proclaimed and taught that love in all that he did and said, modeling for us a new way to live. Pick us up and propel us forward into your world. Help us to remember that you have given to us what we need to be your disciples. We just need to say a resounding "Yes!" to you. Thank you for all the wondrous patience and blessings you pour into our lives each and every day, as we offer our lives back to you in joy and hope. AMEN.