

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2020

First Presbyterian Church  
Union, Missouri

**PENTECOST SUNDAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The day has come, and we are together;  
Surely God is in this place!

**All: The word of the Lord to the prophet:  
I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old shall dream dreams  
and your young shall see visions. (Joel 2)**

One: How manifold are the works of God!  
The Spirit of God fills us with amazement.  
God sets us afire with wonder and awe.

**All: The love of God has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5)**

One: We will sing to God as long as we live.

**All: We will celebrate the gifts of God.**

**Unison: Come, let us worship the Lord!**

**OPENING HYMN** "On Pentecost They Gathered" GtG 289

- 1. On Pentecost they gathered  
quite early in the day,  
a band of Christ's disciples,  
to worship, sing, and pray.  
A mighty wind came blowing,  
filled all the swirling air,  
and tongues of fire aglowing  
inspired each person there.**
- 2. The people all around them  
were startled and amazed  
to understand their language,**

as Christ the Lord they praised.  
What universal message,  
what great good news was here?  
That Christ, once dead, is risen  
to vanquish all our fear.

3. God pours the Holy Spirit  
on all who would believe,  
on women, men, and children  
who would God's grace receive.  
That Spirit knows no limit,  
bestowing life and power.  
The church, formed and reforming,  
responds in every hour.

4. O Spirit, sent from heaven  
on that day long ago,  
rekindle faith among us  
in all life's ebb and flow.  
O give us ears to listen  
and tongues aflame with praise,  
so folk of every nation  
glad songs of joy shall raise.

*(From A Singing Faith. Words © 1981 Jane Parker Huber. Used by permission.)*

#### **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Almighty God,  
you poured your Spirit upon gathered disciples  
creating bold tongues, open ears,  
and a new community of faith.  
We confess that we resist the force of your Spirit among us.  
We hoard earth's resources and refuse  
to share your gifts.  
We dishonor your generosity by withholding  
our charity to those in need.  
We betray your kindness by dealing harshly  
with our enemies.  
We disregard your compassion by severely judging  
the sins of others.  
We fail to listen for your word of grace,  
speak the good news of your love,  
or live as a people made one in Christ.  
Have mercy on us, O God.

**Transform our timid and tightly held lives by the power of your Spirit,  
and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people,  
doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord  
in whose name we pray. Amen.**

## **SILENT CONFESSION**

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: "The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all."

**All: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."**

One: Because Christ died, we receive forgiveness for our sins.

**All: Because he was raised from the dead, we receive new life in him.**

One: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

**All: Let us rejoice in our new creation in Christ!**

## **THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All: And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)*

## **THE WORD**

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Almighty God,  
by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
speak to us in the language of our hearts,  
that we may hear your Word with understanding  
and answer your call with confidence. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE READINGS** Acts 2 (selected verses)

ACTS 2 (selected verses) (Common English Bible+)

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? ... We hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” <sup>12</sup> They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> Others jeered at them, saying, “They are full of new wine!”

<sup>14</sup> Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words! <sup>15</sup> These people are not drunk, as you suspect; after all, it is only nine o’clock in the morning! <sup>16</sup> Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> *In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young will see visions.  
Your elders will dream dreams.*

<sup>18</sup> *Even upon my servants, men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.*

<sup>19</sup> *I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below, ...*

<sup>20</sup> *... before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.*

<sup>21</sup> *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

<sup>22</sup> “Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. <sup>23</sup> In accordance with God’s established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up! God freed him from death’s dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him. ... <sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> He was exalted to God’s right side and received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit. He poured out this Spirit, and you are seeing and hearing the results of his having done so. ...

<sup>36</sup> “Therefore, let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

<sup>37</sup> When the crowd heard this, they were cut to the heart. They said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> This promise is for you, your children, and for all who are far away—as many as the Lord our God invites.” <sup>40</sup> With many other words he testified to them and encouraged them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” <sup>41</sup> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added.

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> Daily, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread from house to house and they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And daily the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**SERMON** "Got It?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Last Sunday night, we had a nice rain at our house. I stood at the open door and just listened to it falling, hitting the grass on the ground, the surface of the lake, the leaves on the trees. What a beautiful sound! The whole experience was nourishing for me. Sustaining. Reviving. It satisfied my soul. It was life-giving.

We read this story of Pentecost: the description of the wind blowing and the tongues of fire resting on the people.

And it's almost as if the Spirit -- the presence of God -- was raining down on the disciples, nourishing them. Sustaining. Reviving. Life-giving.

Love was raining down on the disciples. And they were excited and energized.

"What does this mean?" others asked.

Yes, I know, Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem until they received this gift. Yes, I know, the Holy Spirit represents (at least as Luke tells the story) the empowerment of the disciples for the mission set before them.

But I'm wondering if there also isn't a sense in which this whole story of Pentecost represents that moment when the disciples really, truly 'got it'.

When the full import of the teaching of Christ and his very coming, his ministry and healing, his death and his resurrection and his appearances among them -- when all its truth and significance finally sunk in far enough and deep enough and broad enough to surround their hearts and open their minds and infuse their lives so that now they really 'knew', now they truly saw, now they finally 'got it'.

And the light went on, and it all came together: "Ah, this is what was happening, this is what is going on, this is what we are called to do, this is what God is about, this is what our focus in life is. This is it. Now I get it."

Love. Real love. God cares for us, always, in spite of the terrible stuff we've done, and still do.

God is not going to give up on us.

God is willing to go to hell and back for us, to get us back, to win us back, to restore us to relationship with God.

Look to the cross and see it. Peer into the empty tomb and catch a glimpse of it. Feel the Spirit blow and believe it. Embrace it and incorporate it into your life.  
Love. Real love. Raining down on the people.  
Now I get it!

But not everyone does. Not by a long shot.  
And we don't always either, certainly not all the time.  
When life is cheap -- especially someone else's life -- and we turn a blind eye to the oppression and dehumanizing of another child of God that takes place right before our eyes; then we don't get it.

When a whole class of people can be dismissed as discardable for the sake of another's comfort and convenience; then we don't get it.

When hope is scarce and our days are meaningless and life is nothing more than the next high (whether drug-induced or otherwise); then we don't get it.

And to be quite honest, I'm not sure I know how to help another person 'get it'.  
When the human heart is so turned in upon itself that it cannot see the pain it inflicts upon another, and does not care; I don't know how to help that someone 'get it'.  
When 'I am right and you are wrong!', in spite of all the evidence to the contrary; I don't know how to help that other 'get it'.

But I look at this burgeoning community of people that we read about in Acts 2 (the Pentecost story) -- a community on fire, with purpose, with life -- and I believe we might glean some hints of what it means to 'get it' and how -- maybe -- to share 'the getting'.

For this life is demonstrated and experienced in particular ways.  
Which means it is not experienced in isolation: it is experienced in community, together with others.

Now, already I can hear some people saying, "That's fine, as long as it doesn't include such-n-such or you-know-who or watchamajigger."

Sorry, that's not the plan.

Yes, I know some such-n-such-es and some you-know-who-s and some watchamajiggers that I'd just as soon were not part of the deal, let alone part of the community.

But, that's not how it goes with this life, this calling, this invitation, this love.

It's not pick and choose, where you and I get to pick and choose.

It's pick...all...for it's God who is picking and calling and inviting.

Because I need you and you need me, and we need to embrace this life together.

And we can do that when we realize that the defining force in this life is not you and me but the God who created us in the divine image and calls us together for God's defined purpose and God's intended life.

And so this life is lived in a particular direction.

Which is the whole issue of repentance. "Change your hearts and lives" our passage translated. That's repentance: a change in direction.

Which strongly suggests that AT LEAST SOME of US SOME of the TIME have been (or are) heading in the wrong direction. Many people would say all of us most of the time are heading in the wrong direction.

This also suggests that not just any ole living will do. Remember?: life in a particular direction.

"Well, it's my life and I can do with it what I want."

I'm sorry, that's not life. Certainly not the life God calls us to.

For the direction of this life is not determined or defined by you and me, but by God: the one who gives us the breath of life, the one who knows us better than we know ourselves, the one who knows what kind of life we were created and meant and intended for.

So (once again) God gets to define and determine the shape and direction of life, especially full, abundant, eternal life.

And if our living is not towards God and in God and for others, then it's not true life. Because that's the life -- toward God, in God, for others -- that God created us for and intended for us.

And so this life will take energy and effort.

Energy, for the most part, provided by God with the gift of the Spirit.

But effort that we need to put in ourselves.

For this life is not simply a matter of being plunked down on some idyllic beach and doing nothing, or doing only what I want.

This life takes effort, it takes work, it takes time, it takes giving...of myself. I have to put myself into it to get anything, significant, out of it.

And when I do put myself into it -- when we put ourselves into it -- we see it, and we get it.

And perhaps we may even "see visions and dream dreams" out of a sense of this life's purpose and meaning.

But the dreams will not be automatic.

And the visions will not come easily.

For there is plenty of push back to this life and love that we embrace and that embraces us and yearns to embrace the world.

But we keep going -- we *can* keep going -- and keep embracing, and keep reaching out, and keep pleading for mercy, and keep calling for justice, and keep working with compassion, because this is a life empowered by love, guided by love, infused with love; so that

*...every act, word, thought be love.*

("Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me")

And if we didn't get it before, maybe now we will.  
That moment of realization and insight into the depths and breadth (and yes, mystery) of  
love.

God's love for us always.

And quite honestly, the only way I know truly to reach another's heart and show them  
this life and this love, is to live it.

Which is not a surefire bet that they'll get it.

Remember the cross?

But is a surefire way to proclaim that I do.

In words of compassion we share,  
in deeds of mercy we offer,  
in lives of care we embody with the choices we make and the actions we take,  
in deeds of justice we do,  
in lives of community we undertake,  
in our presence of goodness and integrity,  
in the truthfulness and love that we are (live) --  
in this way we can proclaim to the world,  
"Yeah, I get it!"

And why would we be motivated to demonstrate this life in a particular way? (in  
community)

Why would we be motivated to walk this life in a particular direction?

Why would we ever choose to put our energy and effort into this life?

Precisely because of this love that we now 'get'.

This love of Jesus Christ, his giving of self: the depth and length and height and breadth  
of his love seen in his crucifixion, and his life and love given for us.

*Love so amazing, [Isaac Watts writes] so divine  
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross")

Yes, this love demands, but this love most especially invites: that inner compulsion that  
wraps us in its warm embrace, to which we cannot help but respond and say 'Thank you' with  
every fiber of our being.

Do you get it?

## **AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.**

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,**

**we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,**



whom alone we worship and serve.

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.  
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,  
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,  
and binds us together with all believers  
in the one body of Christ, the Church.  
The same Spirit  
who inspired the prophets and apostles  
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,  
engages us through the Word proclaimed,  
claims us in the waters of baptism,  
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,  
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.  
In a broken and fearful world  
the Spirit gives us courage  
to pray without ceasing,  
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,  
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.  
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,  
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks  
and to live holy and joyful lives,  
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,  
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**With believers in every time and place,  
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death  
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Almighty God,  
at the feast of Pentecost  
you sent your Holy Spirit to the disciples,  
filling them with joy and boldness  
to proclaim the gospel;  
empower us with that same Spirit  
to witness to your redeeming love  
and draw all people to you.

For the church throughout the world,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Inspire the sons and daughters of your church  
for prophetic witness to your truth,  
and upon old and young give clarity of vision  
to acknowledge your saving power in the world.

For nations of the world and their leaders,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Overcome the babble of misunderstanding  
among the nations,  
and let all people hear in their own language and  
recognize in their own culture  
your unifying message of love,  
that we might work together,  
recognizing the common good for all.

For planet Earth, our home,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

By your Spirit, renew the earth,  
make us good stewards of its resources,  
and teach us to enjoy its abundance rightly.

For those in need of healing,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Send your healing Spirit upon those who are sick in body or mind,  
restore them to health,  
and restore to them the joy of salvation.

For our neighbors and members of our civic community,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Teach us to be good neighbors,  
to live in peace with one another,  
and in friendship share the joys and burdens of daily life.

For our children,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Bless our children, protect them from danger,

and help parents and caregivers nurture them  
so that they may mature in wisdom and grow in grace.

For our enemies,  
Almighty God, **hear our prayer.**

*-[brief pause]-*

Bless our enemies  
and show us how we may do good to them  
for the sake of Jesus Christ.

In your mercy, Almighty God, receive our prayers  
and, according to your wisdom,  
provide all that we need;  
through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

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

### **OFFERING**

#### *Invitation*

God's gifts are so numerous we cannot count them.  
Now is the time to declare by our giving  
that we are grateful.  
Now is the time to claim the mission  
God entrusts to us as we express our thanks.  
With thanksgiving for God's gifts to us,  
let us offer ourselves and the fruits of our labor  
for God's work in the world.

#### *Reflection*

(Time of silence to ponder and reflect on our response to God's grace.)

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Almighty God,  
we have opened our hands to you,  
and our hands have been filled with good things.  
Receive the gifts we offer in gratitude for your care for us,  
and help us to bless you with dedication of our lives;  
through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **SENDING**

**CLOSING HYMN** “Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me” GtG 703

1. **Jesus, thy boundless love to me  
no thought can reach, no tongue declare;  
O knit my thankful heart to thee,  
and reign without a rival there!  
Thine wholly, thine alone, I'd live;  
myself to thee entirely give.**
  
2. **O grant that nothing in my soul  
may dwell, but thy pure love alone;  
O may thy love possess me whole,  
my joy, my treasure, and my crown!  
All coldness from my heart remove;  
may every act, word, thought be love.**
  
3. **O Love, how gracious is thy way!  
All fear before thy presence flies;  
care, anguish, sorrow melt away  
where'er thy healing beams arise.  
O Jesus, nothing may I see,  
nothing desire, or seek, but thee.**

*(Public Domain)*

### **CHARGE AND BLESSING**

The Spirit has visited us and prepared us to dream;  
Wind and fire have equipped us to witness.  
We have been filled with the Spirit of love;  
Let us dare to speak and act as inspired people.

May the grace of God the Father bless you with peace,  
may the love of Christ, God's Son, sustain you in joy,

and may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with courage,  
this day and forevermore.

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

**People: ...Amen.**

## **POSTLUDE**

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