

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PENTECOST SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: The day of Pentecost has come, and we are together.
All: Will the works of God be known among us today?
One: God comes to us as a gentle breath or violent wind.
All: Catch your breath, God's breath, and live.
One: The fires of love dispel life's shadows.
All: God's Spirit comes to give us new life.
One: Surely God is in this place!
All: May the glory of God be known among us today!

***OPENING HYMN "Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us" GtG 280**

One: Come, O Spirit,
All: dwell among us;
One: come with Pentecostal power;
**All: give the church a stronger vision;
help us face each crucial hour.**
One: Built upon a firm foundation,
Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone,
**All: still the church is called to mission
that God's love shall be made known.**

One: We would raise our alleluias
for the grace of yester-years;
**All: for tomorrow's unknown pathway,
hear, O Lord, our humble prayers.**
One: In the church's pilgrim journey
you have led us all the way;
**All: still in presence move before us,
fire by night and cloud by day.**

One: Come, O Spirit,
All: dwell among us;
One: give us words of fire and flame.
**All: Help our feeble lips to praise you,
glorify your holy name.**
One: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
**All: Three in One: what mystery!
We would sing our loud hosannas
now and through eternity.**

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***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 hold back the force of your Spirit among us.
We do not 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 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**

One: Let us rejoice in the goodness and grace of the Lord!
**All: Through the death of Christ we are forgiven. By the resurrection of
Christ we are given new life.**
One: So rejoice and celebrate the good news of God's grace!
**All: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new
life. Amen. Alleluia!**

***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

SCRIPTURE READING Acts 2:1-13

ACTS 2:1-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ 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."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Wind Rush and Fire Tongue" by Pastor Bill Vincent

The problem with Pentecost – you heard me correctly: the *problem* with Pentecost – is believing that the rest of life has to look like the birth itself.

Surely we are aware enough of ourselves and our own lives to know that ain't true.

Yet there remains this nagging sense in the back of our minds – in the back of our hearts – that suggests, "If you can't stand up and speak to a crowd like Peter, you're not faithful"; "If you don't convert 3000 souls to add to the roles of the church, you're not being led by the Spirit." The rush of the Spirit wind and the lick of the Spirit flame somehow is required (by some) to be felt by the whole crowd.

Yet, I'm pretty sure that flashy does not faithful make; spectacular does not Spirit-led prove.

Now, don't get me wrong. Just because something is flashy does not mean it's not faithful – it may very well be. Just because something is spectacular, does not mean it's not Spirit-led – it may very well be.

But the present-day life of the church is not mandated to look like the day of its birth: i.e., Pentecost.

There is plenty of work that the Spirit does that is bigger than life...and is not flashy or spectacular – or even noticed by the crowd – yet is still the work of God and the life of God and the purpose of God.

Today is May 23rd: the 143rd day of the year.

The number 143 was an inspirational number for [one Fred] Rogers [of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*]... The number stands for the letters in each word of “I love you.”

So

The governor of Pennsylvania declared May 23 to be a day to honor Fred Rogers and his message.

Fred Rogers believed that

“Each of us is a beloved child of God.” ... He understood that each of us is precious and unique and made from love by Love itself. (Connections 229)

Fred Rogers was not flashy or spectacular. Sometimes he was barely noticed; sometimes even ridiculed. But he was constant, consistent, and caring in his message. He embodied it in his words and his deeds and his life.

And the Spirit of God was at work.

When someone goes to a City Council meeting and speaks simply and clearly in support of affordable housing...

When another offers words of support and encouragement to the neighbor going through a messy divorce...

...if we listen, we can still hear the rustling of the Spirit wind in lives changed.

When he picks up and delivers bags of groceries week after week for his home-bound neighbor...

When she lights a candle and stands vigil in solidarity with those whose lives are systemically diminished and devalued...

...if we look, we can still see a tongue of Spirit fire burning in the heart and hands of lives committed and caring.

What might be signs, identifiers, indications of the Spirit’s work and presence?

Well, it’s universal.

That long list of people and places that seemed to comprise half of our scripture passage for this morning: that list included all kinds and all people throughout the Graeco-Roman world, the Roman Empire.

Remember Jesus’ words to the disciples:

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8-NRSV)

The work of the Spirit crosses boundaries to encompass the world. The arena of the Spirit’s work is not limited to those just like us.

But it does include ‘just like us’.

The work and presence of the Spirit is not only universal; it is also particular: you and me...and every other ‘you’ and ‘me’.

Remember: the people heard the disciples speaking “*in our own languages*”: our own particular language.

One person comments,

Pentecost verifies Christmas. All wrapped up in human form, God comes to us in our very own bodies; God speaks to us our very own language. (G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., Feasting on the Word, Homiletical Perspective)

Incarnation: in the flesh; in your flesh and my flesh, in all shades of flesh.

This is not a “one size fits all” experience. So we need not be surprised when we discern the Spirit at work in a particular life different from our particular life.

And that involves work.

Which means that another indicator of the Spirit’s work and presence is what one person calls “mutual understandability”: various ‘particulars’ experiencing the ‘universal’...together.

The astonishing thing [about the first Pentecost] is...that members from one group can readily make understandable to members from other groups their message concerning “God’s deeds of power.” (Michael H. Floyd, Feasting on the Word, Exegetical Perspective)

Truly amazing.

In a world where Israelis and Palestinians always seem to be pointing the finger at the other...

In a country where the sole purpose of political parties seems to be the defeat of the other...

When opposing sides harden, and divides deepen, and voices become more and more strident...

...mutual understandability is indeed spectacular...and exceedingly rare.

And also, of necessity, Spirit enabled. In small steps. And it takes listening and caring and even loving your enemies.

“I can’t do it!” we say.

That’s why we’re talking about the Spirit: God’s work, God’s doing.

Witness Peter himself. (At times it seems we cannot emphasize this enough.)

On that night – the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested and tried – around a fire in the courtyard, when Peter had the opportunity to speak out and claim his Lord, he could not bring himself even to acknowledge Jesus: Peter denied ever having known Jesus.

Now, in the light of broad daylight, Peter stands before a crowd and claims Jesus and proclaims him Lord.

It took the gift of the Spirit, it took the touch of God to loosen his tongue and embolden his heart and instruct his mind. And that’s what he received.

As one person said it,

God gives what God’s people need. (Warren Carter, Connections p.313)

And that is the work of God's Spirit in our midst.
Not simply an interior, inner warm feeling; not simply my own possession.
But wind and fire – visible manifestations of the presence and power of God at work.

We began with the 'problem' with Pentecost: "Why doesn't your life look like that first Pentecost, flashy and spectacular, with a violent wind blowing and flames leaping?
Well, I have another question (or two) for us to ponder:

How have we heard "*a sound like the rush of a violent wind*" – or gentle – how have we heard a wind so that we heard, in a language understandable to us, "*about God's deeds of power*" and God's awesome work?

Where have we seen "*tongues as of fire*" – or a simple spark – where have we seen a fire so that we have discerned, in a way understandable to us, the presence of God in our midst?

For where we have heard that wind and seen that spark, there is the Spirit moving: bringing life, guiding life; instilling hope, nurturing God's way and God's love.

Which brings us to the challenge and the call.

How will we be heard, even as "*a sound like the rush of a violent wind*" – or gentle – how will we be heard so that others might "*hear [us] speaking,*" in a language understandable to them, "*about God's deeds of power*"?

Where will we be seen, even as "*tongues as of fire*" – or a simple spark – where will we be seen so that others might perceive, in a way understandable to them, about God's power and God's way and God's love?

For when we are heard like that, when we are seen like that, that is the legacy of Pentecost.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**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!"**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Spirit God...
People: ...hear our prayer.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God of mercy, we give you thanks for all that your bounty creates.
We bring our offerings as an expression of thanksgiving for all your gifts.
Bless what we offer and bless those who will be shown deeds of power
through them. May your glory be proclaimed in all we give and all we do,
when we are together and when we scatter to do your will in other places.
Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: **And also with you.**
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: **We lift them to the Lord.**
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Contemporary)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold each of the elements so that we might partake of each together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community.)

“Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” GtG 494

[Bread:]

One: We taste thee, O thou living bread,
All: and long to feast upon thee still.

[Cup:]

One: We drink of thee, the fountainhead,
All: and thirst our souls from thee to fill.

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “As the Wind Song” GtG 292

One: As the wind song through the trees,
as the stirring of the breeze,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God,
One: as the heart made strangely warm,
as the voice within the storm,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God.

One: Never seen, ever known
 where this wind has blown
**All: bringing life, bringing power
 to the world,**
One: as the dancing tongues of fire,
 as the soul's most deep desire,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God.

One: As the rainbow after rain,
 as the hope that's born again,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God,
One: as the green in the spring,
 as a kite on a string,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God,
One: making worlds that are new,
 making peace come true,
**All: bringing gifts, bringing love
 to the world,**
One: as the rising of the yeast,
 as the wine at the feast,
All: so it is with the Spirit of God.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: God's Spirit is being poured out on this church.
All: We carry it with us into our everyday world.
One: With joy and amazement we scatter to serve.
All: God's love is changing us and granting new life.

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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