

“What a Morning!”
St. Paul’s UCC Church
June 5, 2022

Friends in Christ....

I am sure that most of you send Christmas cards. A few of you may send Easter cards. But have any of you ever sent out a Pentecost card or received one. After all, it is considered to be the birth of the Christian church. Pentecost is more than the afterglow of Easter. It is Easter’s culmination. Easter is the celebration of the divine victory over the shame of death by crucifixion, and it finds its fuller meaning in the enlivening of the Christian community through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke’s history of the early church as found in the book of Acts is to illustrate how the risen Lord works through the community through its empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Today is Pentecost.

Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit in our Gospel text from John. Chapters 14 – 17 are Jesus’ farewell sermon (or discourse) before he goes out and is arrested. He is at the table with his disciples. Knowing that he has come from God and is going to God, Jesus spends his last evening with his own. He eats with them. He washes their feet. He gives them a new commandment to “Love One Another.” He talks with them about his relationship with the Father and the Spirit. He promises them “another Companion” (or *paraclete*) and intercedes for them and for those who will come to believe through them.

Greg Carey who teaches New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary wrote the following: “American Protestants often interpret Jesus’ words here as addressed to us as individuals. That is a mistake. Much of the language in the farewell discourse is addressed in the second person plural. That is, *You* really means *y’all*. When Jesus tells the disciples they will know the Spirit because the Spirit abides with them and lives in them, he is speaking to them collectively. The Spirit constitutes and empowers us not alone but in community.”

The disciples are distressed. Thomas wants guidance to follow Jesus to the ultimate destination. Philip will settle for a full revelation of God. But Jesus has big news for them. Let us hear a portion of the farewell discourse:

Gospel: John 14:8-17 (CEB)

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus replied, “Do not you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do not you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. ¹² I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

I Will Not Leave You as Orphans

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. ¹⁷This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

John 14, the first chapter of Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples, begins and ends with messages of comfort: “Do not let your hearts be troubled” and “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Philip’s not getting it, though. Or, in his despair over losing Jesus, he just needs more—more evidence, more comfort, more flesh-and-blood Jesus instead of spiritual-experience Jesus. “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied,” he says.

What that means is that even though this text ends up talking about peace and of Jesus’ telling the disciples “do not be afraid”, let’s just state the merely obvious that in the next 48-72 or so hours of their lives, the eleven disciples still with Jesus in that room that night would have plenty of occasions to be very, very afraid, frightened, disoriented. Feeling “at peace” for these disciples about anything would shortly feel like the remotest of all possibilities.

The disciples had not realized that the Father was there in all that and do maybe in the context of John 14, a troubling, frightening context that would soon turn into a nightmare of fright and terror for the disciples – what Jesus is really saying is that when life gets tough, when the bottom falls out, the Father (via the Holy Spirit after Pentecost) would surely be there in those (ordinary if oft-scary) circumstances as well.

A couple of examples: 1) When the doctor steps out of surgery with bad news. And 2) when you are huddled underneath a desk in the basement while a twister shatters the glass in the house above you.

Remember that God through the Holy Spirit is there with you.

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost in a very dramatic fashion. Hear what happened that morning:

Acts Lesson

Acts 2:1-21 (CEB)

Pentecost

2 When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. **4** They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

5 There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages. **7** They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, are not all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them? **8** How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), **11** Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!” **12** They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?” **13** Others jeered at them, saying, “They are full of new wine!”

¹⁴ 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! ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suspect; after all, it is only nine o’clock in the morning! ¹⁶ Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ *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.

¹⁸ *Even upon my servants, men and women,*

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ *I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above*

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.

²⁰ *The sun will be changed into darkness,*

and the moon will be changed into blood,

before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.

²¹ *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

May God bless our hearing of his holy Word. Amen.

What a morning it was! Can you just picture the chaos that took place? We can use our imagination to get a picture. One thing we do not need to imagine is the sound of the wind. With our windy weather, severe storms, and even a derecho, we know the sounds.

The story begins with the church “all together in one place.” Then, the church, scattered by the Wind of God, encountered the world in one place. By the providence of God, “there were staying in Jerusalem God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.” That is clearly an overstatement, but the listing of nations (verses 9-11) represented in that crowd indicates that they came from the four corners of the known world, or at least the three contingent continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

And when the Wind blew, the crowd from “every nation under heaven” was swept together to hear the Gospel. “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment....” What was “this sound?” Not the roaring of the wind or the crackling of the tongues of fire, but the babbling of tongues “speaking in their own language.”

Further, notice how the crowd that came together in bewilderment stayed together in belief. After the preaching of the Gospel of the Risen Christ, three thousand people “from every nation under heaven” repented, believed, were baptized, and joined the church. “All the believers were together and had everything in common.” The awe born of confusion over the multi-lingual preaching of the Gospel is replaced by the awe born of the multi-lingual community of disciples whose former divisions have been blown away by the wind of the Spirit (2:43).

As Peter says at the very beginning of his Pentecost sermon, quoting God in the prophecy of Joel, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” In what follows, he proclaims that the company

of the saved will not be divided by age, or sex, or class, or language, or nation, or color, or political persuasion, or whatever. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Everyone! Everyone! That’s the world changing conclusion of the first part of Peter’s sermon.

Then the Holy Spirit applies that conclusion to real people, people from every nation under heaven. When Peter declares that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,” people are cut to the heart and are blown into the multi-generational, multi-national, multi-lingual, borderless, classless, colorless, genderless church in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28)

Of course, there are still male and female, and Jew and Gentile, and upper class and lower class, and Romans and Parthians, and so forth. The Gospel does not erase the realities of life in this world. However, it changes how we react to them. Because Jesus is our Lord and Savior, the former boundaries that divided us do not matter anymore. We are bound together in him. Always have been, always will be.

This means that the Gospel is anti-hating the “other,” whoever the “other” may be. The Gospel is against dividing humanity based on the differences that are inherent in the human race.

Unity is what the Gospel is all about—unity with God first of all, but also unity with the rest of the human race, and within each person, and with the created world around us. God wants his fractured world whole again. Shalom is God’s desire, good pleasure, will, and plan.

The fact of the matter is that “spirit” can be elusive. As Frederick Buechner notes, the word “spirit” gets drained of meaning through over-use. We hear about “school spirit,” the “Spirit of ’76,” “team spirit,” “the Christmas spirit.” But it can be difficult to define just what “spirit” means for any of those things. The adjective “spiritual” has not fared much better. This word has been plastered all over the place in the last twenty years to the point where it can define everything from genuinely pious Christian faith all the way over to those who talk about the “Zen of economics.” Ostensibly “spiritual people” may be those who attend church every week or those who never go to church but who use their Jeep Grand Cherokee to zip up to the edge of a cliff on weekends so they can meditate on the unity of sky, rock, and soul.

Pentecost is the day the Holy Spirit of God came upon the church in power for the very first time. And like the breath in your lungs right now, if we did not have the Holy Spirit, the church would be dead. Of course, even so, it is part of the very nature of the Holy Spirit that it does not call much attention to itself. The Spirit’s job seems to be a history-long highlighting of Jesus. So, in order not to get in the way of anyone’s ability to see Jesus as the Living Lord, the Holy Spirit seems quite content to remain about as invisible as a puff of air. The Spirit does not mind one bit if you look clean through him so long as what you are looking at through the Spirit is the Christ of God.

The Holy Spirit of Pentecost was poured out for so many reasons. The Spirit now gives us gifts and talents, provides us with our life’s callings in whatever vocation and work we pursue. The Spirit meets us in Christian community. We experience the risen Christ through our

gathering and the spiritual rituals – communion, baptism, communal prayer, the singing of hymns – that hold the heft of a tradition passed on from one generation to the next.

The Spirit is invisible but is within each one of us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.