

Spirit Poured
Text: Acts 2:1-21
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – May 23, 2021
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Today is Pentecost Sunday. This is the day when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the believers gathered in Jerusalem. The day we call the birthday of the Church – the day that the believers began to assemble and be what has become the institution we call the church. We recall this morning the events of that unforgettable day in the life of the apostles and those gathered for the Feast.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Picture the scene there. The sound of a violent wind – tongues of fire – speaking in other tongues. Speaking in a language that was understood by all, no matter what region they were from or what dialect and language was native to them. It had to have been a terrifying experience – and exciting at the same time. For, no doubt, the apostles remembered that the Holy Spirit – the Advocate – was promised to them by Jesus. Jesus told them that they would not be alone after He departed, but this Holy Spirit would be a comforter, a peace, a presence that would help them in the next phase of their journey in this newfound faith.

“When they heard this, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?’” Of course they were bewildered. Certainly they were utterly amazed. This was like nothing anyone had ever seen before. How was this possible? What did this mean? They understood what others were

saying. There was listening going on – and understanding. What could this mean? How would this become the start of the church?

In just a few chapters, Acts 4, we will see how the community of faith would come together. They would be moved to share everything they had in common. They would break bread together. They would serve together, share together, work together. And what would God do? God would add to their number daily those who were being saved. Pentecost was a starting point for them, which would lead to them more fully realizing the importance and vitality of their community together.

I feel like we are in a time of rebirth of our church – of THE church – in these times today. As we move toward fully reopening our country, our state, and the church, we are faced with a new reality. We have been through so much in the past 14 months. We have been isolated, alone, afraid, angry, tired – no, exhausted, impatient, and at our wits' end. But here we are today, gathered virtually through Zoom – a gift from God for so many reasons – and in person with no limits. It almost feels like a new beginning this morning, and how appropriate on this Pentecost Sunday. For where do we go, with the Spirit poured out on us? What does church look like for us in the coming months and years? How do we reach out to a post-pandemic world that is looking for – some, desperately – hope and love? How do we build bridges among people so that everyone feels valued and important and loved? How do we continue to enhance technology so that we can be joined by brothers and sisters from around the country, as well as those within our geographic boundaries?

These are our challenges. This is our reality. No matter what we do or how we do it, the goal is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, to go and make disciples of all nations, as Jesus commanded the disciples with the Great Commission. We are to be Spirit-filled, sharing the

love of Christ and looking out for the least of these. The least of these who have been through the difficult days of Covid. The least of these who are longing to be connected – whether in person or online – with another. The least of these who have never been part of something bigger, and we have a community of faith waiting to welcome them.

For those gathered in Jerusalem, this was a time to listen, to understand that which was previously not understood, and to live life in the Spirit. “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” The Spirit’s coming was fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, and here was an opportunity to work the wonders of the Lord for these believers. They encountered opposition and those who just wanted to brush off what had happened in the name of the Lord. “Oh, they are just drunk. This is not for real.” But Peter recognized the God-moment that this was and defended the faith as all part of God’s plan. No matter the naysayers, this is for real. This is from God. The Spirit is alive and well in our midst. Let us rejoice. We can hear and listen to one another – we can respond in faith to another – we can take the message of Jesus Christ to the limits.

Friends, we have been through so much. We are here, at this point, ready to see what God has in store for us. We are a place that welcomes those looking for hope and love. We will continue to love and care for one another – pray for and with one another – invest in one another as we grow in our faith in Christ. And we do that coming from different backgrounds, different experiences, different thought. We leave those differences at the door – of the sanctuary or of the room in which we connect to the service – in order to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. That is the rebirth we need in our society – with our neighbors – from the church.

Carey Nieuwhof, former lawyer and founding pastor of Connexus Community Church near Toronto, sums up where many who live in our time are feeling right now – and how the

church can respond. He writes, “Most people (including you, I suspect) are exhausted by the division, tribalization, and anger that characterizes culture today. It’s pretty clear that the culture is tired of itself too, but it doesn’t quite know how to escape. That’s the perfect opportunity for the church to simply be the church. An exhausted culture needs an alternative to itself, not an echo of itself. Authentic, grace-filled, hope-bearing, truthful people are what our friends and neighbors need. A generation tired of hate, yet caught in its grip, will only be released from it if there’s a clear alternative.

Imagine, if in the next few years in your church: Love surged. Hope got fueled. You could disagree but not be disagreeable. You focused on what united people, not on what divided people. In a divided culture, Christians should be the help and the hope, not the hate” (From Internet. <https://careynieuwhof.com/the-coming-church-split-its-not-what-you-think/>. 05/10/21).

To be the help and the hope. To have love surge. To focus on what unites us – those things we have in common so that when we have to address the things on which we disagree, there is trust and love as our foundation. This is the church I long to return to. This is the church that I hope will be reborn as we get back together in-person or stay connected virtually. To have the Spirit poured on each of us so that we can understand one another more fully – love one another more deeply – and serve the Lord more faithfully. This is the Pentecost I pray for – for each of us. To God be the glory! Let us pray...

God of Pentecost, we thank You for sending Your Spirit to those gathered in Jerusalem so that they might listen to one another and to understand. Thank You for Your Spirit, which helps us in our weakness and sustains us in all things. Thank You for Your Spirit, which draws us together – from all the differences we share – to sit in Your presence and share in the love of Christ. Guide us, we pray, in Jesus’ name, Amen.