

The gift of abundant life!

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17

Pentecost Sunday is often believed to be the birth of the Christian church. It is a day to celebrate; a celebration of people coming together. A diverse group of people who were connected through the Holy Spirit, poured out upon the people from God. It says in the scriptures that apostles had gathered in one place, and many followers with them. When suddenly, the heavens opened and there was a rush of a wind, and the appearance of fire upon the gathered believers. It was reported that the Holy Spirit filled them, and suddenly they began to speak in their own language, *and* they understood each other. The bystanders felt that they were truly reveling in the Spirit. So much so that they began to wonder if they had been drinking a little too early and a little too much.

But then Peter, who was standing with them, began to explain: “We are not drunk, but we are fulfilling what the prophet Joel proclaimed. That God proclaimed that God’s Spirit would pour upon the people and they would be given dreams and visions, and they will bring God’s kingdom to fruition. The people who you presume to be drunk are speaking of God and God’s work in the world. Of how God is creating and bringing harmony to all.”

The Spirit of God is what brings new life; gives new life to a dispirited band of disciples, who are still grieving the loss of their mentor. We too, like those dispirited disciples, after what we have all been through, have also become a bit dispirited at times. We’ve been through turmoil and grief and transition. What once was has shifted, changed. The pandemic sent us out into the world, out on our own, and what connected us was the Holy Spirit. The Spirit advocated for the disciples to feel and live in the Spirit, which makes new life possible. This outpouring of the Spirit – God’s energy – touches every living thing. Pentecost represents the “in-breaking of God’s purpose for all humanity”. Bringing humanity together in understanding despite our differences. Furthermore, “Pentecost tells us the good news of our humanity, ruined and distorted in our distrust, has now been restored through Jesus.”¹

How does Jesus do this? Okay, we know it’s through the Holy Spirit, but how does that happen? When the Holy Spirit descends on the people, there is clarity, we are told there is new life and there new understanding. The Spirit is the living presence of God poured out on us. The fiery

¹ Michael Jinkins, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 3. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 16.

love creating community where strangers once stood. When we gather as we are right now and the Spirit is poured upon us, we are no longer strangers to one another.

So really, at this point, as we think about what has happened and what is coming and what new life for the church looks like, I would suggest that the church needs to shift, to adapt, and to find a way to unleash the Spirit. We need to stop containing the Spirit and trying to tame it. Instead of advocating for our own individual piece of ministry and mission that we are passionate about, we are being called to live in a new way that we are passionate about, we are called to live in a new way – in a spirit of adoption and communion. We need to see God’s world as a *kin-dom*, not a kingdom. “A kin-dom of God includes the whole system of life and regards all humans and all Creation as inherently good and valued.”²

We have an anthem here at Robertson-Wesley that talks about how we walk in the Spirit, and there are several categories of the Spirit that we walk in:

- We believe that we walk in the **Spirit of Friendship**, where we reach out to one another. We learn about each others’ lives, what we are passionate about, what we value.
- We walk in the **Spirit of Prayer**, believing in the power that prayer brings. Knowing that through prayer, we can find peace. We can find forgiveness and reconciliation.
- We walk in the **Spirit of Caring**, where we take time to provide others with the support they need, whether it is simply sitting with them, asking the hard questions, providing them with a meal when they don’t have one.
- We walk in the **Spirit of Justice**, where we speak out when people have been treated poorly. We speak out or we find a way for the people who don’t have a voice to be able to speak their truth.
- We walk in the **Spirit of Wisdom**, where we take time to learn from one another knowing that not one of us knows everything. But in dialogue, in asking questions, in admitting our own biases, we can find new understandings and learn to appreciate and value each person.
- Finally, we walk in a **Spirit of Joy**. I hope that next Sunday, you will be here as we bless and celebrate with joy the fact that we are an affirming congregation. That we have much gratitude for all that has been done, here and in this world. God’s wisdom is revealed through diversity, which is brought together in love.

If we are given new life – and God believes it is an abundant life – what does that look like? What does that feel like? One theologian said, “The place God calls you to is a place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” So what is your place of deep gladness? What are you most grateful for? What do you value in life? What directs your daily actions? And now think about that in the context of the world’s deepest hunger.

² Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*. (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021), p. 391 Kindle Edition

As a community of faith, we have all that we need to live as God has called us. We know that because each of you are here; each of you have been given gifts of the Spirit, to which we are to use in this world. It doesn't mean that we as a community of faith need to be everything to everyone. We need to take into consideration our context in which we minister and do mission together. We need to listen to the people that we serve; to help them to identify what the deep hunger of this community is. And then once identified, we will begin to see the path that the Spirit of God has laid out for us to journey on. We need to have more dialogue. Even if it feels like we're speaking different languages sometimes, I implore you to listen deeply. Not just to the voice, but to the Spirit behind the words. Listen to what is being said, and instead of tearing down people's ideas, let's build them up. Let's add to them and make them even more. It doesn't matter how long you've been here or how short a time you've been participating. You matter. What you know, what you've experienced, is of value.

So how will we honour one another's gifts on this day of Pentecost? If we accept and believe as Paul writes, "that all led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you have been received, not in a spirit of slavery, so you do not need to fall back into fear, but instead receive a spirit of adoption." Know that you belong. That you are a part of God's family: a kingdom where every person is essential and valued. We do not need to fear for the church; we do not need to fear change. We need to have faith. We need to receive this outpouring of the Spirit upon us. Accept it, and allow them to inspire us, fire us, and spark us into being out in the world, seeking truth, knowing God and serving others. The story of Pentecost depicts a world where even in our differences, we can live and work and be in communion with one another and all of Creation. May the Holy Spirit bring us into this communion. To discern, to engage and dialogue and to come together so that we may seek ways of justice in the world where we love and serve others. Where we live with respect in creation. And affirm in this world that all living beings and creatures are worthy of love. You are all loved by God, and so go out into this world and be a blessing as you have been called.