

PENTECOST AND THE PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE

A sermon for May 20, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba
Pentecost Sunday

Gospel: **John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15** *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

‘I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.’

Acts 2:1-21 *The Coming of the Holy Spirit*

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*“In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,*

*in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Ezekiel 37:1-14 The Valley of Dry Bones

'The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.'

Psalms 104:24-34, 35b (30) Praise the Lord, O my soul

*'O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die*

*and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.
May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.*

Romans 8:22-27 Our Hope of Deliverance

'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'

Today we observe Pentecost, the third great festival of the Christian liturgical year. The color of the day is red, symbolic of Pentecostal fire and the blood of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

In the Jewish tradition, the term **Pentecost** was derived from the Greek name (Pentēkostē) for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, Shavuot -- Spring harvest festival, that was held 50 days after the Passover celebration. During the observance, Jews thanked God for the early wheat harvest with their 'first fruits.' Because it is one of three pilgrimage festivals ordained in the Torah, Jerusalem was crowded with Hebrew peoples from all over the world.

Therefore, on the Feast of Weeks (the Jewish Pentecost) following Jesus ascension, Peter was giving a speech which drew from an international audience. With the rush of a 'mighty wind' and tongues of fire, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. This First Day of the Christian Pentecost resulted in a worldwide harvest of new believers. Scriptures tell us that 3000 people accepted Christ that day.

So, Pentecost is the Birthday of the Church. Happy birthday Church! The Church's birthday was prophesied by the Prophet Joel years before, saying: *'And*

it shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour my Spirit on all flesh, Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men will dream dreams...'

Jesus had instructed the disciples to wait for the coming of the power from on high before they attempted to go out. He used two names to describe the Holy Spirit: 1) the 'Advocate,' which means the helping hand, who encourages and strengthens; and 2) '*the Spirit of Truth*,' that teaches and illuminates the truth of Scripture for believers.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was a spectacular event! There was roaring of wind, tongues of fire burning on the heads of the disciples as they began to speak in different languages. Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence. It burns away undesirable elements of our lives and sets our hearts aflame.

On this day, the disciples were transformed into apostles, meaning, messengers or missionaries. They would be led by the apostle Peter. Their special assignment was to spread the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection.

More than describing something that happened once in history, Pentecost is an on-going phenomenon in the Christian Church. Today we tend to identify churches whose primary emphasis is baptism in the Holy Spirit (evidenced by speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing) with particular groups such as the Pentecostal churches, the Assemblies of God, and other community churches. In saying this, I do not intend to demean in any way the people who use the word 'pentecost' to define their unique tradition within the Christian family. There are over seven-hundred organized Pentecostals! A large number of these are independent churches that are loosely affiliated through the Pentecostal World Fellowship. There are over 279 million Pentecostal churches worldwide, and this movement is growing in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Today, many churches that grew out of Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, particularly in the so called Third World, have intentionally embraced some of the characteristics of the Pentecostal experience. These include some form of emotional worship; individual witness; a call to accept Jesus Christ as ones personal Lord and Savior.

Therefore, Pentecost has become more than a dramatic faith-defining event. Pentecost implies that God is continually calling believers into the spirit of Mission, witness, growth and change.

The Spirit who gave birth to the Church, keeps reviving the Church of all times and all places so that she can face the challenges of time wisely. This means that the fire of the Spirit must keep burning, reviving believers to become more apostolic. To preach the Christ, the one who overcame death and won victory over sin.

God places His Spirit within His church so that the Church can continue to be apostolic. To be apostolic is to be mission-oriented. It is to be sent out, filled with the Spirit, to preach the good news the way Peter did on the Day of Pentecost.

Christ lives! Therefore, the Church lives! (Ezekiel 37:14) And the dry bones spoken of by the Prophet Ezekiel are brought to life by the Spirit of God. (Ezekiel 37:10)

The goal of the Christian Church is not simply to remember what happened on that first Pentecost. It is to keep alive that growth and expand the Church. The goal is to infuse life and growth into the drying bones of the Church. Sometimes, in the life of a congregation, we feel like the dry bones described by the Prophet Ezekiel. Yet with the Holy Spirit, we are revived to witness for Christ.

We need to think of ourselves as ‘Pentecostal’ Lutherans in the sense that the Holy Spirit is actively working with us and in us. The Book of Acts gives examples of the Holy Spirit changing people’s lives: *Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch* (Acts 8:26-40); *Paul was converted by the Spirit of Pentecost* (Acts 9:1-19), *Peter embraced an inclusive vision of the Church thus, allowing the baptism of Cornelius and his household who were non-Jewish* (Acts 10: 1-48). Each of these accounts demonstrates the power of the Spirit, in facing challenges wisely.

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, Christianity has been extended to all nations. Just as visitors in Jerusalem were surprised to hear the apostles speaking in their own languages, God sends us into all nations to baptize and teach everyone. The Lord commanded us to do just that.

Pentecost must happen regularly in local congregations to move them from rigid traditions. To move them to embrace anew the counsel of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that is needed to make the Church grow in this challenging world. We cannot afford to be in decline. We are entrusted with the Great Commission to spread the good news.

- We cannot afford to lose members.
- We cannot afford to have internal conflicts.
- We cannot afford to see our future blighted.

A ‘Pentecostal experience’ must take place here and now. Allow the Holy Spirit to revive your dry bones!

There is not one area but multiple areas on which we can work. The Spirit of Pentecost will enable us to see what those areas are and to work hard to bring the people to fully participate in worship. Pentecost happens when we are willing to make changes, to promote growth.

Learn from the disciples. They stayed together and waited patiently for the Spirit’s counsel and empowerment to face the new challenges. We, too, are called to wait for the Spirit. To stay connected with each other and listen to the

Spirit when he counsels us. We must respect each other's spiritual gifts in order to shine. These gifts come from the Holy Spirit himself.

We need to get rid of the old ways. The expression, "*we have always done it this way*" does not work. It does not attract new members.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, "*Truly I tell you, **the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do.***" ***The Pentecostal Spirit*** allows us to change the ways we do things so that we may do the works that the Lord calls us to do. Let us have the confidence to face challenges with courage, to reach out in love and compassion to people around us, and to trust God as we venture the unknown, knowing that we cannot see where the pathway may lead.

Let us revive the Pentecostal Spirit of volunteering in this congregation. Let us welcome visitors and share with them the warmth of Christian love, adding wisdom, voice, and hard work to the many tasks that we are called to carry out. To continue as a faithful Christian congregation, we must listen to the Advocate, the Spirit's counsel.

The first disciples took risks to achieve the vision of growth. We, too, must be willing to take wise risks. I am convinced that we can be vehicles for bringing tongues of fire to our hungry neighborhoods with the good news.

The Holy Spirit's main job, His purpose, His goal, is to bring people to Christ. When the Spirit brings us to Jesus and guides us into all truth, Jesus is glorified. Sometimes we Lutherans ignore the Holy Spirit as if he is not in our midst.

We don't talk a lot about the Holy Spirit or ask for the Holy Spirit's counsel. We must remember that when the Spirit speaks to us, He doesn't speak on His own. He speaks on behalf of God the Father and God the Son.

Let us seek that the Holy Spirit will "***guide us into all the truth -- all the truth!***"

Amen.

Amen!