

Day of Pentecost

May 31, 2020

Introduction

Pentecost derives its name from the Jewish festival celebrating the harvest and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai fifty days after Passover. Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the Holy Spirit as God's presence within and among us. In Acts the Spirit arrives in rushing wind and flame, bringing God's presence to all people. Paul reminds us that though we each have different capacities, we are unified in the Spirit that equips us with these gifts. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to forgive sin. We celebrate that we too are given the breath of the Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world.



Entrance Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival that marked the fiftieth day after Passover. Luke portrays the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the disciples before the gathered and astonished people assembled in Jerusalem for the festival. Filled with the Spirit, the disciples were able to witness to the power of Christ's resurrection.

Read the text [here](#).

Gathering Hymn

Come Holy Ghost

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, on this day you open the hearts of your faithful people by sending into us your Holy Spirit. Direct us by the light of that Spirit, that we may have a right judgment in all things and rejoice at all times in your peace, through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Numbers 11:24-30

The spirit of God rested upon seventy elders in Israel who had been chosen to share the burden of leadership with Moses. When some became jealous that two others also had the spirit and could prophesy, Moses said that he hoped that all of God's people would be prophets.

Read the text [here](#).

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Paul is helping the Corinthians understand the relationship between our God-given unity and Spirit-created diversity. The Spirit creates the unity of faith and gives all Christians diverse gifts for the common benefit of all. We need one another's diverse spiritual gifts because the same Spirit has given them to each person for the common good.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: John 7:37-39

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as living water, quenching the thirst of all who come to him and filling the hearts of believers until they overflow.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

If I asked each of you what problems our community, country, and world faces today, the lists of concerns we would name would likely include damaging tropical storms and flooding, burgeoning hunger and unemployment, widespread racial injustice and unrest, deep political and ideological divides on multiple issues, and of course the global COVID-19 pandemic, with a death toll of over 100,000 in our nation - a complex and overwhelming array of concerns far beyond our human ability to fix.

Those seem a far cry from the concerns that occupied the disciples on that long-ago Pentecost. They were sheltering in place together in an upper room where they had celebrated the Passover meal with Jesus nearly two months before. In that short time, it seemed their whole world had changed. Overnight, they had gone from a band of twelve following a charismatic, but itinerant rabbi, who both charmed crowds with the stories he told and the miracles he performed AND angered the authorities with the scandalous things he said and did as he journeyed throughout the land. The very same stories and miracles had been understood quite differently by his followers and by the skeptical religious authorities.

Their leader, Jesus, had been miraculously raised from death to new life, and appeared to them in that same upper room. The disciples had seen him several more times over the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension into the heavens as he spent time with them, continuing to teach them. His final instructions before he ascended had been to go back to the city and wait until they were clothed with power. (Luke 24:49) And so, on Pentecost, when that power, the Holy Spirit, descended upon them, they were waiting in that familiar upper room where so many things had happened in recent weeks.

This short passage includes an invitation that Jesus proclaimed on a previous Pentecost – the Jewish Festival of Booths. Because this was a harvest festival in a very dry land, it is no surprise that the people would yearn for abundant water, specifically living or running water. We know that water is needed for crops to flourish. While we have had an abundance lately, we often pray for life-giving rain in our worship services during the growing season.

But we do not usually focus on water at Pentecost, do we? Pentecost brings images of flames to mind for us. And of course, wind. The very word for the Spirit in Greek is *pneuma* – the root word for pneumatic or air power that we use in technology. And for pneumonia - an illness of our lungs that makes it difficult for us to breathe.

In these days when the news reports are filled with statistics and guidelines and debates about the transmission and progression of a virus that robs us of our ability to breathe, and also of an incident which left a man dead after pleading for mercy because he could not breathe, then air - and wind - and breath - become the natural focus of our Pentecost.

Try as we might to control the news, or the pandemic, or the actions of other people, we cannot. What we can do is read again texts that describe the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

What we learn from the Pentecost account in Acts is that the Spirit arrives and works mysteriously and with great power, to stir people to life-changing words and faith.

We read in Numbers that God sends the Spirit where God wills, to inspire the words and deeds of people, even when some like Eldad and Medad did not cooperate. When others protested, Moses cried out for God to send the Spirit on all the people, wishing that they could all speak God’s word.

We learn from Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, that it is the Spirit which gives us faith and the power to declare that Jesus is Lord. The same Spirit gives us gifts, not just for our use, but for the benefit of the entire church. Gifts like wisdom, knowledge, healing, and discernment. Gifts that bring unity and strength to the community of faith.

And from Jesus’ words in this short gospel text, we learn that when Jesus spoke about “ ‘living water,’ he was speaking of the Holy Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.” (8:39, **New Living Translation**)

After his Resurrection and Ascension, when Jesus was raised from death into life and then ascended into glory, the stage was set for the power of the Holy Spirit to be sent into the world, into the community of believers, and into the lives of each and every one of us.

Through the waters of our baptism, we have received the powerful gifts of the Holy Spirit, that we might worship and praise God and serve others in the church and the community in faith and in love, in all times and places. Today, we ask that God might breathe his Spirit on us again and again. Amen.

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.**

For us and for our salvation

**he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

We call on your spirit of unity, giving thanks for our different vocations. Activate and utilize the diverse gifts present in your church, that they reveal your love for all.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of life, present in air, wind, humidity, storms, and oxygen in our atmosphere, breathing energy into all things. Heal with your breath the whole creation, especially those who struggle to breathe due to air pollution.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of righteousness. Wherever we as a people are divided, unite us. Wherever we are prideful, humble us. Give each one of us a heart for justice and empathy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of healing. Bless nurses, doctors, midwives, chaplains, counselors, nursing home staff, home health care staff, and hospice workers as they care for those in need. We pray for all who long for comfort (*especially*).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We call on your spirit of friendship. Give us a spirit of welcome to those whom we meet. Surprise us daily with unexpected grace, that we rejoice in every blessing you send.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We call on your spirit of hope. As you have led your saints in all times and places, stir in us the desire to follow their example, leading us from death to new life in you.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW #582 / LBW #523

Holy Spirit, Ever Dwelling

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.