

...before you begin, you will need something red to wave whenever you read the word 'Spirit' !!

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.'

Peter Addresses the Crowd

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."

Let us pray: Holy One,
your word has many powers, help us to know them all.
Like at that first Pentecost, we ask that you do it again.
May we, as individuals and churches, be empowered to be
your messengers of healing, hope, transformation and truth
in the world, your world. Amen.

Billy Graham said in his travels he often met men and women who were very different from him. But after a few minutes, it was as if they had known each other all their lives. Why? Because they all knew who Jesus Christ was, and is. Their common spiritual bond erased all the barriers that separated them, they were part of the same family.

The same happens to us- when you're on vacation in another town, you might go to church, any Christian denomination. And after church you're introduced to one of the 'regulars', and you find you both have something, someone, a place, in common. And even if you don't speak to anyone, you feel at home. (especially if they're singing from Voices United)
Christians almost always seem to recognize each other.
There's something familiar about them/us.

And on this day of gift-giving, we've all been in this situation- That embarrassing time when we receive a gift from someone, and when we opened it, we had no idea what it even was, or what it was for. Maybe it's Christmas, or our birthday, and someone gives us a beautifully wrapped present. We undo the ribbon and the wrapping paper, everyone is watching us. We open the box and...oh no...you give a weak smile..
..you've never seen one of these before...

You scramble to come up with somethingthe last thing you want to do is seem ungrateful. Is it a pencil sharpener, or a coffee grinder? a scarf, or a table napkin? Earrings, or fishing lures?
The person who gave it to you is eagerly watching your face,
"Well....do you like it?" Finally, you have to say something, so you say,
"Oh, how did you know? Thank you so much. I've been meaning to buy a tire pressure gauge." Disappointed, the person says, "Tire gauge? It's a meat thermometer!"

Sometimes there's the same wondering and uncertainty, in a much deeper way, about Pentecost. 50 days after Passover.

You've heard the story- the disciples and so many others all gathered in one place, when suddenly there was the sound of rushing wind (like a tornado), then tongues as of fire appeared, resting on every head. (...wind and fire = the story of Elijah -1Kings 19) and each one of them began speaking in their own language of origin. Amazing.

On Pentecost Sunday, in a very dramatic way, something has been given to the disciples/and us - a gift from God. Did the disciples know what it was at first? The gift was the Holy Spirit.

And in return we say, "We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit."

But when we open the box... what exactly is this gift of the Holy Spirit? A tire gauge or a meat thermometer?

Do we say, "This isn't what I asked for." or do we politely say, "Thanks, it's just what I've always wanted!" (God would love that!)

Some people are fascinated by this story;

a sound like the rush of a violent wind blowing through the congregation, tongues of fire resting on people's heads without burning them. Amazing.

The festival of Pentecost isn't celebrated the way Christmas and Easter are, there are no glad tidings and alleluias. There's no statutory day-off.

Maybe it's just as well, because the focus of Pentecost is aimed directly at us, the community of disciples and friends now known as 'the church.'

The gift of the Holy Spirit gives us authority and an identity through these words;

"Before the Day of the Lord arrives, the Day tremendous and marvelous; and whoever calls out for help to me, will be saved." (The Message bible Acts 20b-22)

But don't we already know this? Do we share this, practice it every day?

Or do we assume, take it for granted, Christians all over the world believe this, and so everything's okay. Maybe it's these verses that we need to read again.

What about the others?

Languages/people of all kinds are acceptable in God's eyes, everyone who calls to God for help. Do we share this news? Here in the United Church we seem to have gotten tepid, lukewarm the last few decades when it comes to talking about our faith. Part of the reason might be because there are so few of us. Maybe we're shy about our faith, we don't want other people to know what we believe, other than -Christmas and Easter are special, religious holidays for us.

Excuses? Hmmm

The Gift of Pentecost is the gift of energy and excitement of the beginning of the church, the Christian church, this church. Pentecost is God's way of waking us up. Bringing life to the church of the world and to our congregation....and allowing wonder and excitement to energize the church. Are We awake?

In our living rooms, at the dining room table, on our balconies, on our beds?
The gift is for us, it's ours...if we want it.

We often just take the story on its own, but remember last week we read of Jesus' Ascension. And the story following today's reading of Pentecost, is the story of the new converts, gathered, baptised, sharing meals together, praying, and finally being sent. These three stories are part of the same. Luke continues - Jesus has appeared again, and instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. The day has finally arrived.

Institution and Mission.

Rev. Thomas Long says, "Whatever we're given at Pentecost, it doesn't lift us up out of our earthly realities." I think the second part of that idea should be the Holy Spirit causes us to go deeper. Where pain, illness, corruption, confusion and loneliness are, where people don't believe they are loved by God, where humanity is.

There's something that separates the world's power from the Holy Spirit's power; world vs. Holy Spirit. I don't think the world's power stands a chance....or does it? We've talked about this a lot...how there are all kinds of things to do on Sunday mornings- sports games/practices, coffee shops, restaurant breakfasts, yard work, sleeping in, maybe just plain apathy.

So, is the world's power winning? Is it an obvious kind of winning?
Or a fake kind of winning? Are people just kidding themselves? Do they tell themselves they don't need church (religion)? Maybe they don't know anything about church...just the negative parts, and there's plenty of that out there.

We are here, wherever we are, (and we will be at the church when we can gather together again),

because we believe the Good News, and have come to have our belief affirmed.

Because we're sure we want to hear more and read more.

Because we stopped going to church ages ago, and we want to give it another try.

Because we don't know anything much about Christianity. ("What's this part about flames and stuff? Sounds serious.")

Because we are like those who laughed at the gathered crowd, saying they were drunk at nine o'clock in the morning and making all kinds of noise! Of course, when they heard Peter's sermon, they were so embarrassed and ashamed, they asked, "What should we do?"

Are we embarrassed and ashamed, and do we ask, "What should we do?"

Regardless of where we are on our faith-journey, we are all seekers.

We are all asking questions.

Speaking in another language.

The world's languages are many. The Internet has made us aware of just how many there are. Completely different languages, dialects, sub-dialects, versions of. Isn't computer binary a language of sorts?

Acts 1:4 was a sign that all were to be included in the new community.

The new church found its voice in every language.

The new church shared the most important news, the Good News, with the world-life is stronger than death.

The new church went to places where people were joyfully blind.

They went to the places of unknowing and despair.

They went to places where people spoke their own language.

And they carried the flame before them.

The flames of Pentecost do not consume us;

they make us stronger than ever, and we are sent.

Not just on the day of Pentecost, but every day; we are sent.