

## WE NEED PENTECOST MAY 31, 2020

Welcome Friends, to a streaming of the Worship Service on Pentecost Sunday.

I am Joy Smith the pastor here and I bring you greetings from our congregation. I am glad you found us on-line. Even though we are separated in so many ways, we can still be a community of people who gather together in a tumultuous time. You will see and hear a full worship service. With music, choir, and reflections on scripture. Let us be together.

Please pray with me-  
We come to hear the stories of other people in another world long ago.  
We come to hear the stories that are also about us today in this place.  
God, give us ears to listen. eyes to see, hearts to accept.

Acts 2:1-13

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, 10 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.”

I have no idea if you've ever been to church on Pentecost Sunday. Maybe you came across this video by accident. Pentecost may be a word you never use.

Is it anything like the Pentagon? Well, not exactly. But there's a clue in that first part. Pentagon - a five-sided military building in Washington. Pentecost - five times 10, that is, 50 days after Easter. But that's really the end of the similarity.

If you've never been to church on Pentecost or if you've been lots of times, I invite you to imagine what it might be like.

Here is an example. A woman wandered into a Presbyterian church on Sunday morning, sat down in a pew, and joined in the service, which was already underway. Everything went according to the prescribed order: hymns, prayers, readings. When the minister stood up in the pulpit and began to preach, however, the woman became suddenly very animated—and vocally responsive.

“Yes,” she said out loud, when she heard him make a point she liked. “Yes, that’s true. Praise the Lord—praise His holy name,” she said a few minutes later—and louder.

People began to shuffle and squirm uneasily; some turned around in their pews to see who was doing this strange thing. “Amen,” she shouted.

And an usher, discreetly, of course, approached her and whispered -  
"Ma'am is there something wrong?"

"Why no," she said, "I've got the Spirit!" Whereupon he said, "Well, you didn't get it here."

(pause)

She is - Pentecost.

3Since I am Presbyterian, I am going to make fun of us. Maybe you don't  
about Presbyterians. We are considered the orderly branch of Christianity.

My Pentecostal friend who is also a pastor was literally shocked when I  
explained to her how I create a bulletin for every Sunday morning. I write  
out the sequence, even write the prayers, place hymns, print it up, hand it  
out, call it "The Order of Worship," and everyone notices when you  
deviate from the proper order.

We like to believe we do things "decently and in order". (I am not sure that  
is always the case.)

My wise Pentecostal friend tells me that I have pretty much insulated  
myself from the Holy Spirit. I am going out on a limb here, but I expect we  
are not the only church who isolates from the Holy Spirit.

We all need Pentecost.

What I mean by Holy Spirit is the active presence of God; the "energy of  
God". At creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The Spirit,  
the Holy Spirit, is the creative energy of God, the creative energy behind all  
that is. The word spirit can be translated wind, or breath.

So, try it out - wind as the breath or Spirit of God or try Spirit as breath of  
God that God breathes into human beings brings us to life.

And just like the wind blows where it wants, the Holy Spirit shows up  
anywhere when we least expect. Not only does the Spirit create, energize,  
rouse - the Holy Spirit changes, alters circumstances, transforms people. At  
least I am counting on it.

We need Pentecost.

It is one of our best stories. It happened when the disciples are still in Jerusalem a month and a half after the Passover. Jesus had been crucified and they had those mysteriously powerful Easter experiences - that led them to believe Jesus wasn't dead at all - he was alive. And now they were waiting - lying low, not wanting to draw attention to themselves, waiting more or less for something to happen.

And then on the day of Pentecost, the Festival of Weeks that celebrates the end of the spring harvest, Jerusalem was once again filled with pilgrims from all over the world: Mesopotamia, Judea, Asia, Egypt, Libya. Suddenly something happened, something uncanny, extraordinary, mysterious - One of those experiences that doesn't translate or explained well, like you had to be there to get- ushering wind and tongues of fire.

And what happened to the disciples? They were transformed. Suddenly they found their voices and the courage to use them. Suddenly they could speak and be understood by all those people, speaking all those foreign languages.

Here is the thing about that day - the miracle of Pentecost is not the extraordinary experience of speaking in different tongues but its opposite: it's about clarity, understanding. People could hear. They were listening. Communication happened. And the whole world was there, with its incredible diversity, racial, gender, cultural, linguistic.

Pentecost is about God's active, creative, transforming presence. God's Spirit, can transcend diversity and create something new: a community—a community that speaks and listens and hears and understands, which is to say, communicates. And so, the gift of Pentecost is the gift of understanding”.

As I said -we need Pentecost.

And then, Peter Gomes, who was a renowned preacher - who is an African American, makes an important powerful observation: “The diversity we celebrate so frequently and loudly . . . does not serve the world – instead maintains our differences and puts up a wall we can hide behind and can protect ourselves against others.

At Pentecost, diversity was overcome by a power that transcended it, the power to understand, to hear in one's own language, one's own accent.

“Pentecost, did not reduce their identity, their particularity - They became more than they had been, they became one with the larger community.”  
God have mercy on us.

I pray for the day when my nation understands that about itself and its role in the family of nations, a day when our relationship with others in the world is to express and nurture understanding and communication among nations, is based on something other than self-interest.

I pray for a day when we will listen, truly, to the voices of the rest of the world and begin to respect and behave as if we understood.

I pray for the day, when we listen and understand that there are some of us who are privileged – and have health care, jobs. And others who are killed because of the color of their skin. I am so reminded today of Mr. George Floyd - an African American who was strangled to death by white police officers in Minneapolis, my home town.

I pray for the day when we will listen, truly, to those whose voices are ignored, abused and where truth is ridiculed.

Jesus, we need Pentecost.

I have to believe though – that the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is a power at work and will bring nations together. I have to believe that the life-giving energy of God is a power at work - bringing us together because of our differences not because we are all the same. With our different voices – we can hear each other.

I believe, we together, no small task these days, can work to create and nurture respect and listen and understand and communicate—where the shouting is the loudest and the anger deepest.

I read this – that “Our failure to communicate is not a failure of technique (we have lots of books and therapists to teach us) but it is about our will.”

Maybe we really don't want to communicate. We'd rather shout one another down. Or literally kill each other because we do not want to hear.

I fantasize about a new Pentecost and the Holy Spirit descending and a loud voice from heaven saying, “Shut up and listen for a change.”

We don't listen because, we don't want to. You know what I am talking about. You're sharing with another person about a serious matter, you're speaking, expressing your thoughts, and you know your partner isn't listening, isn't hearing, but busy figuring out what to say crafting their retort, their next argument.

You've experienced it: you cautiously share something from your heart - anxiety, a concern about the surgery you're facing next week. And you haven't even gotten all of it out when your conversation partner goes you one better and tells you about a similar procedure, they or their friend had. And not listening at all.

Sometimes with our partners – one or the other or both stop listening altogether and instead retreat into the isolation and loneliness and hell of silence.

One of the first things seminary students are taught in courses in pastoral care is to “shut up and listen,” and not tell your own story – to a hospital patient about someone we know who had that operation and it was awful, to learn the art of “active listening.”

So here we are for months physically separated from one another in so many ways. And communication is more important than ever. So, when you are talking on the phone, sending email, twitter, blogging – listen and hear what people are saying.

Some learn it better than others, but when we listen intently, honor and care for and regard and love – you are instruments of God's Holy Spirit.

Pentecost.

A listening heart. Communication between nations and individuals: people whose voices are otherwise ignored – and partners, siblings, children, lovers and friends and political opponents and acquaintances.

Communication is a product of will—the result of a listening heart. When we can really do that – when we get it? It will shape our actions.

Pentecost came to heal divisions, to bring people together—into communication—communion. When we listen actively, with our hearts, to one another, to the presence and voice of God, we give and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit—understanding, communication.

We need Pentecost. May it be so.

Amen.