

Welcome to **Pentecost Sunday**. It is a day which is often referred to as the “birth of the church.” For it was the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the followers of Jesus and empowered them to be witnesses in the world to the resurrection of Christ.

We read this account in Acts 2. On that day the disciples were all gathered together and suddenly there was a sound. It was a mighty wind from heaven and it filled the entire house where they were gathered. There were little flames above each person’s head and they began to speak different languages. This caused some confusion among people in the town and one of them said, -oh, don’t pay any attention; they have probably been dipping into the wine too heavily. It is kind of amusing what happens next as Peter stands up and says, “They are not drunk. It is only nine o’clock in the morning.” I wonder how this story would have gone if the Spirit would have descended on them at 5:30 in evening, right in the middle of cocktail hour?

Peter then quotes the prophet Joel (he is a prophet who wrote late in the Old Testament, closer to the birth of Jesus). Joel says, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” and he goes on to say that this includes young and old, men and women, even slaves. In other words, **there will be no gender, age, or social status bias here when it comes to the Holy Spirit.** We talk about the issue of diversity these days, but the Holy Spirit was way ahead of the times.

Now some people have asked this question: **Is the Holy Spirit given to all people?** Good question, if you ask me. I read the Old Testament and quite honestly, it seems that this was selective for a long time. Are there some who get the Spirit and some who didn’t? In the Old Testament the answer is ‘yes.’ And it is odd. The Spirit of God seemed to have worked selectively. A craftsman named Bezalel got it (“singled out” is the description) so he could be inspired to work with stone and wood in the building of a sanctuary. (Exodus 31:1-5) A guy named Othniel—one of the Judges before Israel had kings, had the Spirit of God come “over him” and he led the Israelites back into trusting God after they had wandered away. (Judges 3:10) There were warriors such as Gideon (Judges 6:33ff) who were overcome by the Spirit. In one case (1 Samuel 19:18-21) various agents of Saul were searching for David, who was hiding from Saul; they were sent into “ecstasy” by the Spirit, which ruined Saul’s devious plans and saved David. And of course, there is King David (Psalm 51:11) who pleaded “do not take your Holy Spirit from me.” Obviously he had the Spirit or he would not be asking not to have taken.

So-the Spirit selected people for holy tasks. And then along comes the prophet Joel, who is quoted in the reading from Acts today—who says that now, in God’s time, **“I will pour out the Spirit on all flesh.”** All—not just a select few for special jobs. And that has not changed. **“All” includes me and you-together in this church.** That is what happened on Pentecost.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not a first-time event of the Spirit, but an **intensifying** of the Spirit-covering us in a communal way—a church—a community of the Holy Spirit. That is why today is often called the “birthday of the church.” It is part of Jesus’ promise,

as we see in the Gospel reading today. He calls the Spirit an “advocate”—that is a power and companion that is empowering you—all of us, yes, and the Spirit also is looking out for our own good. That is what an advocate does for us. Looks after our best interests. Jesus says it will “guide you into all the truth.” The Spirit will declare to our inner beings what Jesus wants for us. It comes as the inner voice we often hear—or sometimes more dramatically. It is a message from beyond that we need to listen to. Oh, we can resist, and we often do—but our stubbornness does not mean it is not there. When the FedEx truck pulls up at the front door and the guy rings the bell and leaves the package, I can run in my bedroom and hide under the covers all I want—but that package is still there.

You see, at the time of the original Pentecost, many of the disciples and followers of Jesus felt abandoned. Has Jesus left us for good and now are we on our own to only deal with memories? Well, Jesus had promised the arrival of the Spirit, and they were waiting. Like in our daily life, it seemed at times like the evils of this world and all that is going on are miles away from God, who is sitting on a throne in some distant land just watching it all.

I was recently reading about an Arctic explorer who ended up near the North Pole. After two long years in the lonely northland he wrote a short message, tied it under the wing of a carrier pigeon, and prepared to turn it loose to make the 2,000 mile trip back to Norway. The explorer gazed around him at the desolation. Not a creature to be seen. There was nothing but ice, snow, and bitter cold. He held the trembling bird in his hand, then released her into the icy atmosphere. The bird circled three times and then started the southward flight. Miles and miles later the bird dropped into the lap of the explorer’s wife. By the arrival of the bird, his wife knew that “all was well.”

Likewise, the coming of the Holy Spirit,—often symbolized as the Heavenly Dove, proved to the disciples of Jesus that he had entered the heavenly sanctuary—that his work in the world as a living person was done. And now he was there, alive with the Father, and is there for us still—and was sending us an Advocate—the Holy Spirit, to help us out and communicate his wishes for us. All is well, I am still with you.

Some of us here at St. Luke’s experience the Holy Spirit in dramatic, life-changing encounters. Many of us experience an inner voice, or urging. Some of us kind of know it is there, but for one reason or another do not open themselves to it. Despite different experiences, there is only **one Spirit**. The Spirit of God in the Old Testament—the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. It gives us comfort, gives us power and confidence, and leads us to wisdom on how to live life. And no matter how it comes—it is there to assure us of Jesus’ presence with us.

So I pray, on the Pentecost weekend, for you to honor this day and give thanks for the coming of the Spirit—and that **it is for all—and for us as a church**, not just a selected few. In this age of competing voices that want your attention and loyalty—please pray for yourself, and your loved ones, and this church—St. Luke’s, to listen to the most important voice there is—the Holy Spirit who sends you greetings and guidance from Jesus, our risen savior. Amen