

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Pentecost, 2026

“When it was evening on that first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked (out of fear) ... Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.... As the Father has sent me, so I send you....” Apologies to John 20:19-23

Like the disciples before us, we gather here, in this Upper Room, on a day of Pentecost, another day that the Holy Spirit will be on the prowl somewhere, everywhere - filling a place, a home, a church, a hospital room, a jail cell, even, possibly, a meeting of political advisors... anywhere that God’s people gather - whatever nationality, whatever religious belief, whatever political party, even where people may gather to celebrate the New York Yankees.... The Holy Spirit is moving to bring thoughtfulness, to heal wounds, to give courage and strength and support.

Primarily, the Holy Spirit seems to come to help when we are most fearful and afraid. The disciples gathered in a small upper room – not a banquet hall – where they shared their fears and anxiety. It had been enough just to come to Jerusalem, the capitol city of their occupied country. But to come at festival time when both the nominal native government and the Roman overseers were especially nervous – and, now, to have suffered to public execution of their beloved Jesus – this terrified group of fishermen and rural Palestinians were all that was left of the Jesus Movement. No one knew who might be lurking just on the other side of that door - who might be the next person knocking on their door – another soldier, another executioner, something more fearful... Here they gathered, perhaps for the last time, maybe to say goodbye, maybe to face their own deaths, maybe just trying to return to “life as usual”.

What they hadn't counted on was the Wind – the mighty Wind of God, the Holy Spirit that has a way of changing things even when we want to hold it back – water into wine, fishermen into prophets, fearful friends into a band of brothers and sisters, raising the dead to life. It even seems to have inspired my favorite, headstrong, surprising disciple Saint Peter to march right out into the frightening streets of Jerusalem to preach the crazy news of the Risen Christ!

All of us have, at one time or another, experienced significant loss – maybe not as publicly as the disciples, but nonetheless we have lost some of those who gave us life, gave us direction, encouragement, and hope when we most needed it. Maybe we found ourselves locked in an Upper Room of sorts trying to hold back the world, and we needed a great wind, even a storm to drive us out - back into life filled with new purpose and power. Maybe we would find a Mary or Martha or a St Peter knocking on our locked door – inviting us into a community of faith, a community of others who have experienced some the same fears, similar losses, anxiousness, the same struggles.

The Gospel uses the word “adoption” to describe our inclusion with people of faith who have gone before. It reminds me of a billboard along the highway Richmond, VA that reads something like, “Remember Superman was adopted, too!” Though the billboard is meant to encourage people to adopt children without families, in this context of the Spirit it reminds us that even we might be able to do some amazing things. If we are the adopted children of God – chosen by God, accepted by God, loved by God just as we are – then maybe, just maybe we have a lot more to give than we ever imagined. As adopted children, we are a chosen people! We may look like Clark Kent, but underneath that flimsy exterior of skin and bones we are people of immense power and enormous worth!

And finally, it seems that those who have found faith or courage or wisdom – gifts of the Spirit – are often the most able to share it, to give it away

– and by giving it away, they seem to have even more. The disciples who remained in Jerusalem in those days found their faith and commitment grow as they dealt with their loss and their fear. When they were finally able to open that door and let the world in, not only did they open themselves to persecution and death, but they opened their hearts to share a Gospel that changed the world.

As Christians, gathering now in this Upper Room, we are called daily to step out into the world, let go the fears that hold us back, and declare that a new day has come. Whether those fears stem from the current political climate or certain policies; whether we're worried about changes in the economy that will change the structure of businesses and jobs; whether we're worried about the current war in the Middle East; or maybe just about getting older and fearing our loss of abilities and beloved talents (I, for one, am sorry I can't hit a 90 mile/hour fastball anymore – but, of course, I never could...), whatever our fears, the Mighty Wind of God – the one who has called us, adopted us, sent us is stronger, bigger, more powerful than anything that could separate us from the love of God or from each another.

Today, the Day of Pentecost, that wind of God continues to break down +walls of separation. It breaks through our attempts to avoid responding to real or imagined threats, and it brings together all those who champion the love of God in Christ Jesus. May we allow ourselves to be conduits of this great Wind, that others may find the courage, the healing, the faith to open their locked doors and let the wind blow through. Amen