

SERMON NOTES

Acts 2.1-21, Day of Pentecost, Year C

June 8, 2025

INTRO

Dear Siblings in Christ, I greet you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am Bishop Timothy Graham, called to serve the Indiana-Kentucky Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I bring greetings from all of us in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, including our Synod staff.

This is our Synod Sermon for Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025.

GREETING & INVOCATION

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ the One
who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen.

GOSPEL – FIRST READING: ACTS 2:1-21

Because it is Pentecost Sunday, we will use the reading from Acts as our gospel reading.

P This is the gospel according to Acts, the second chapter.

C **Glory to you, O Lord.**

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ 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, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ '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.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' "

P This is the gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to you, O Christ.

SONG –

Spirit of the Living God, Fall fresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God, Fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me
Spirit of the Living God, Fall fresh on me.

PRAYER –

SERMON

Remember back in 2018 when a short audio clip ignited a lively debate online centered around one intriguing question: Are we hearing "Laurel" or "Yanny"? This phenomenon sparked engaging discussions across social media, with people passionately divided between these two words, beautifully illustrating how our individual perceptions can differ so much even when we are experiencing the same moment. In some ways, it's no different when we watch sports—did the person score or not, was it a foul or not, did the refs favor one team over another, and so on. We watch the same event but all see it from different angles.

The Laurel vs Nanny case became more than just a casual debate; it powerfully demonstrated how our unique identities influence how we interpret the world around us. Audiologists explained that the differences in what we hear stem from the specific sound frequencies each person perceives, shedding further light on the fascinating complexity of the human experience. Just as those who heard "Laurel" found it hard to understand how others perceived "Yanny," we often find ourselves wrestling with the challenge of grasping the viewpoints of those who see the world differently.

This leads us to an important question that resonates through history and continues to be relevant today: How can we successfully navigate these differences? Do they really have to divide us? The celebration of Pentecost helps provide some insight into this very challenge.

When the Spirit of Pentecost came upon the earth, it wasn't just a quiet, serene moment of reflection. In fact, we might ask if the Spirit has ever entered into a scene calmly? In Genesis, we are told that the Spirit hovered over the chaos of a formless void. And in our scripture today, she bursts forth with a tumult of wind and fire, and voices from all over the world joined together, creating a fantastic scene filled with chaos and unity. In that moment, the Tower of Babel was reversed as all the language, ethnicity, and ideology barriers were wonderfully shattered, allowing people to feel a deep sense of connection rooted in the gospel of God's love through Christ.

Imagine the Medes, Elamites, and Persians gathering in one vibrant place, each tuning in to the same gospel truth while viewing it through their unique experiences. In a beautiful display of harmony, the Holy Spirit bridged communication barriers with its infinite wisdom, enabling the people to truly hear each other. This moment is a powerful witness to the unity God's Spirit can create even amid differences.

As this incredible event came to a close, everyone there found themselves asking, "What does this mean?" This question is just as important for us today. It invites us to dig deeper into our understanding of our baptismal identity, the gospel truth, and the community of love we share in Christ. In a world that often feels and is divided, we frequently encounter similar questions: What does it really mean when we struggle to find common ground on the issues that matter, particularly around loving and including others? Why do our identities feel challenged by the uncertainty that new perspectives can bring? It's often fear, but what are we afraid of?

Consider the divisions in our society today—whether it's the challenges of racial tensions, the disputes around gender identity and the inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community, the debates around our environment, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, or polarizing political views. These disparities can lead to discussions that reduce complex issues to either-or options, such as pro-business or pro-environment, or even the different approaches to helping others, i.e., "giving a person a fish" versus "teaching a person how to fish." Pentecost, however, invites us to look beyond these simplistic frameworks and explore a more profound understanding in light of God's Spirit dwelling among us.

In the spirit of Pentecost, we are invited to listen—truly listen—to the stories and experiences of others and how God's love frees them. By understanding the perspectives of those who seem different from us, we can foster a deeper connection that transcends division. Rooted in one baptism, one faith, one love, and one God, we have a central starting point, both theologically and practically, for beginning to embrace others.

Just as those in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost were brought together by the good news of Jesus Christ, we, too, united in Christ through Word and Sacrament, can build bridges over troubled waters. When God's Spirit unites us, ideas that address our concerns and needs begin to flourish. When the Holy Spirit enters our hearts, we are empowered to embrace others, not by our own volition but through God's love for us, displayed in the cross of Christ. Just as the early church came together and shared everything they had, they embodied a beautiful vision that dismantled barriers of all kinds and nurtured a sense of community and belonging that God intended for humanity.

The significance of Pentecost encourages us to reflect on the true meaning of unity. Unity is not about everyone being the same; that's conformity. Instead, unity embraces our unique differences while uniting us in and under God's love. God reminds us that the entire world and all humanity are loved simply because

God deems it so. Every person on this planet is a child of God. Through the Holy Spirit, we are called to see each individual with God's eyes and hear each voice with God's ears. Together, we can make God's love a tangible presence in the lives of all people, including those who are different from us. The Spirit encourages us to raise our voices in support of this beautiful, life-giving mission.

Just like the early church, which the Holy Spirit inspired to embrace its rich variety, we are called to reflect that beautiful unity in our churches and communities today. Our differences don't merely coexist with our faith; they enhance it! Every unique perspective brings valuable insights that enrich our understanding of God's creation and the wonderful people in it.

The question that arose at Pentecost calls out for our heartfelt attention: What does this mean for us today? What does it signify when the old identities we cling to begin to fade? How can we respond when the Spirit invites us to explore new possibilities, challenging our long-held beliefs?

It's natural to feel a bit uncomfortable with these questions. Change often feels disorienting, especially when we focus on what we perceive as loss. But through the Spirit's power, it is possible! With God, all things are possible. When God empowers us to trust in God's love and grace for us, just as we are, our response should be to trust that God can help us envision a beautiful community—one rooted in love, mercy, and compassion. Further along in Acts 2:44-45, we read, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need." This Spirit-infused community shows us that we can create transformative relationships if we are willing. My other program has a line that says we claim spiritual progress, not perfection. But we keep trying. Inch by inch it's a cinch; yard by yard it's hard!

Pentecost invites us to reflect deeply! As we ponder the experiences of the first witnesses of Pentecost, let's take a moment to ask ourselves: What does this mean for our lives and our community? Guided by God's compassion and understanding, the Holy Spirit can lead us into God's mission for the church, unifying our hearts in Christ while celebrating the beautiful variety of His creation.

Dear ones, may we seek the Spirit's guidance in every interaction, creating a community that mirrors the spirit of the early church—together in love, purpose, and mission. Thanks be to God. Amen.