

Sermon for Day of Pentecost 2025
What is so amazing . . .

I'm fairly certain that at least a few of you have noticed
how contrary many of the biblical stories seem to be.
Let's just take a look at the lessons assigned for today.
We just heard the story of the outpouring
of the Holy Spirit on the first day of Pentecost
that, frankly, sounds, well, chaotic.
A rush of great wind.
Followed by tongues of fire.
And then people speaking all at once
in a bunch of different languages
from countries none of us can even pronounce with any confidence
and we probably couldn't identify on a map.
Some of you may be thinking . . .
well that's how I think about religion in general—
chaotic and incomprehensible.
Others may be thinking, well that's the glorious diversity, equality and
inclusiveness of God's love—otherwise known as the kingdom of God.

And then we hear Jesus talking about giving us peace
while also saying if you love me,
you will keep my keep my commandments.
Record scratch!
Jesus said . . . keep my commandments?!
As in there is more than the new commandment he gave—
which was to love one another as he has loved us?
Frankly, you're either asking what's up with that
or you get that Jesus is saying
that all of those cherished or ignored or excused away commandments
are essential and life affirming.
Or you think Jesus is talking about something akin to traffic violations.
Compliance is a nicety and violations are a nuisance.
Yet, either the word of God is a matter of life or death or . . . it's not.

So, holding that all of that in mind . . .
Here is my first question.
What is amazing you today?
I'm talking about the kind of amazement
that deepens your life and gives meaning.
The kind of amazement
that leaves you weeping in gratitude
or surprises you with you by goodness and beauty.
What about what causes you to whisper to yourself,
"Amen, let it be so."
Or what takes your breath away,
leaves you speechless,
and makes you glad to be alive?
What has opened your heart and eyes to more than you ever imagined?
What makes you wonder how you ever got through that rough time in
your life?

It's amazing to me that when I'm preaching that I say something I didn't
plan to say and didn't even know I knew until I said it.
I'm amazed at the courage and trust of others when they share with me
their lives . . . their hurts and tears, hopes and dreams,
the stories of their faith journey.
I am amazed by the variety, the diversity and unpredictability of the
those stories of faith and how our life together has brought us this far.

What about you?
What is amazing you today?
If nothing is amazing you, why not?
When was the last time you were amazed?
What happened?

And here is my second question.
What is perplexing you today?

What about the perplexity that leaves you shaking your head in disbelief—the things that cause you to ask,
“How can this be?”

or to say, “I just don’t get it.”

I’m thinking about the times when we are confused or confounded by a situation that has left us lost and without a solution.

Those are the times when you we go through a list of possible explanations or ways forward but don’t find one.

It’s the times of perplexity that makes us angry
but also want to work for change.

The times that give rise to prophetic words, dreams and visions.

I’m thinking about the perplexity that leaves us disappointed and frustrated and causes us to cry tears of anguish and sorrow,
and how of if we’ll get through the day, the month, the year or years.

These days I find I’m perplexed
by how we often talk to and about one another,
and our inability or refusal to listen to one another.

I’m confounded by the tolerance of violence in our world and how too many can turn away from injustice and say we need to move on.

I’m perplexed by own inconsistencies and self-contractions.

How perplexed I am by how I and so many others
keep the same patterns of thought and behavior
even when we know they aren’t working
and we say we want something else.

What about you?

What is perplexing you today?

What is confounding you?

Maybe you are wondering why I am asking questions about your amazement and your perplexity.

Perhaps you are wondering what does all this have to do
with the Day of Pentecost and . . . holy baptism?

So here is another question.
What if amazement and perplexity
are ways the Spirit moves in our lives?
And . . . I can't take credit for this question.
It's in scripture itself.
"All were amazed and perplexed" the evangelist Luke writes
about disciples' experience of that first Day of Pentecost in
the book of Acts.

Here's the thing.
If we caught up in taking the story literally,
we will lose the greater truths the story wants to give us.
I've never had a "sound like rush of violent wind" from heaven fill my
house, but I have felt the winds of change blowing through my life.
I have a feeling you have too.
Sometimes I have been amazed by what was happening
and sometimes I have been perplexed . . . and sometimes it was both.
It's my guess, that most of you know what that's like, right?

Has a divided tongue of fire ever rested on you? No? Me neither?
Yet, I have felt fire in my gut and my heart.
Haven't you experienced times
when you were driven by a passion
that connected you to the needs of others,
something larger than and beyond yourself?
I'm not talking about griping and complaining about your neighbor's
lawn or property that isn't properly maintained.
I'm talking about the fire of injustice,
of a desire for equity and the common good.
(Frankly, I don't think Jesus really cares if your lawn is well manicured
but I think he may care deeply
if your neighbor is fed, sheltered, safe and loved.)
So . . . what amazement or perplexity have you felt by
regarding your neighbor's wellbeing?
What burning questions do you ask about their welfare?

You know what . . .
and I'm guessing you won't be surprised by this:
I've never suddenly spoken or understood a foreign language.
But I have had times when I needed to change the voices
I listened to within and outside me.
There have been times when I've wanted to find new ways to
communicate with others
and discover a new language within my heart.
Perhaps you've experienced that, too?
Changing the language we speak and listen to,
changes how we see, think, and understand the world.
It may not be as seamless as the story in Acts, but I have found that it
usually brings about both perplexity but also amazement . . .
and new understanding.

Wherever there is amazement and perplexity the Spirit of God is
moving, the mighty wind of God is blowing and
the breath of God is giving life.
Look at your experiences of amazement and perplexity.
Feel the way they move and affect you and relationships with your
neighbors—who are God's gifts to you.
Look at and ponder your experiences of amazement and perplexity.
Feel the way they move and affect you.
They are all Holy Spirit moments.

They are moments when we ask, "What does this mean?"
That's the question the disciples ask in their amazement and perplexity
in today's lesson.
What about you?

I imagine many of us as we witness the Holy Baptism of Lexi Ann
will be both amazed and perplexed.
What does this mean?—which is a familiar question to all who were
raised Lutheran and are familiar with Luther's Small Catechism.

So in the spirit of amazement and perplexity,
let us listen together to part of what Luther wrote about Holy Baptism—

What is baptism?

Baptism is not simply plain water.

Instead, it is water used according to God's command
and connected with God's word.

How can water do such great things?

Clearly the water does not do it, but the word of God, which is with and
alongside the water, and faith, which trusts the word of God in the water.
For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism,
but with the word of God it is a baptism, that, is, a grace-filled water of
life, and "bath or the new birth in the Holy Spirit" . . .

Truly this is amazing!

Truly this is perplexing!

But above all, it is God's amazing grace

in the love of Jesus Christ

whose Spirit has sealed us as his own

and has poured out

the gifts of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,

the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord,

the spirit of joy in God's presence . . .

In all our amazement and perplexity,

we say, thanks be to God

and welcome Lexi Ann Del Re to the baptismal waters

and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.