

“God’s Gift Comes in So Many Ways”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
June 5, 2022 – John Knox Presbyterian Church

Acts 2:1-21

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 people 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, 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.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews^[a] and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

As we were sitting eating dinner last night with my family, I asked them what comes to mind when they think of Pentecost. My son in-law said that everyone tends to wear red. My daughter, Bethany, said she remembered that we dedicate the Pentecost offering which part of it goes to support the Young Adult Volunteers or YAVs in the Presbyterian Church USA. She served as a YAV in San Antonio, Texas for a year working with Catholic Charities and helping refugees transition to the United States. This is very dear to her.

My other daughter, Sarah, said that the Holy Spirit comes with wind and fire. But, the thing she remembers most was that people were speaking in different languages and that they could understand each other. I began to think about how this impacted Sarah. She had studied French in High School. She went to France for a summer through the IU Honors program, which she lived with a French family and only spoke their language. At that point in time, she was fluent in this language. This experience with newness of culture, language and atmosphere changed her life.

As we celebrate Pentecost today, we remember this beloved story of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were huddled together still wondering what was going to happen next! Jesus had ascended into heaven, and they were the ones left behind. What were they going to do?

The chaos begins to take place. The bold wind blows in with force. The fire appears over everyone's head. And if that wasn't enough to catch everyone's attention, all the people represented that day spoke in their homeland's native tongue AND everyone understood it.

The Holy Spirit arrives and creates mess and causes a ruckus. As an outsider looking at this scene, it is no wonder they thought that they were drunk. But, Peter comes to their aid reminding them that this was actually written in the Book of Joel many years before this. Peter says, "God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. This gift will be for all: men, women, rich, poor, young and old. This gift will allow everyone to have visions and dreams for the future."

Many think of Pentecost as being the birthday of the church, which it is. We hear as we continue to read the book of Acts, that these new believers go out and do extraordinary things by building the church. But, it is also about the transformation that takes place as people's perspectives are broadened. The Spirit came boldly to knock down boundaries. There would be no longer Jew or Gentile, young or old, male or female. ALL people, who called on the Lord, will be saved!

On the day when all this craziness occurred, it gave new life, new direction to that community. They had received a purpose in becoming the Body of Christ, the church. The Spirit of God is what moves within us, amongst us and between us. It is what gives us the energy, imagination, strength and love to do God's work in the church.

Frederick Buechner says, "*Spiritus is the Latin word for Spirit and it is the same word for breath. Breath is what you have when you're alive and don't have when you're dead. Thus spirit = breath = life, the aliveness and power of your life, and to speak of God's Spirit (or your soul) is to speak of the power of life that is in you. When your Spirit is unusually alive, you can breathe it out into other lives. God's Spirit can inspire you and it can inspire others.*" (*Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith: Beyond Words* by Frederick Buechner; 2004; published by Harper San Francisco; p. 376)

How is God's Spirit working in you? In me? When have you felt the power of life – God's Spirit strong in yourself? Perhaps, you were finally able to find the words to speak to someone who caused you hurt, anger or frustration. The Spirit allowed for grace and forgiveness to be exchanged and friendship was restored. Perhaps, God's Spirit gave you strength, courage and wisdom to face a challenge in your life. You had the ability to persevere through it. Perhaps, God's Spirit gave you the confidence to use gifts that you didn't think you had. You were able to succeed and blossom. Perhaps, God's Spirit gave you vision to see something in your life that needed to be addressed. Perhaps, God's Spirit opened your ears to hear the call to minister to someone or something.

How is God's Spirit working in the church? I wanted to share with you about our all officer retreat that we had two weeks ago because God's Spirit was alive and full of power of life on that day! Pastor Beth did an amazing job walking us through an exercise called asset mapping. But before we started the activity, we saw a short video titled, "Every Day Creativity" by DeWitt Jones. He was a talented photographer for National Geographic for years.

DeWitt defined creativity as being a moment when something ordinary becomes extraordinary and in doing so you fall in love with the world around you. How do you do this? The patterns of life need to be broken. If you do things over and over the same way, you will never be able to get a different perspective on the matter. Don't be afraid to make a mistake and take a risk. He shared that he must take on average 14,000 pictures to get 30 great ones for an article. We need to keep changing the lenses of how we see things to get a better view. Always know that you can take a problem and turn it into an opportunity. Be patient! Keep pressing on!

For the Asset Mapping, each group was asked to list on pieces of paper all the assets that John Knox has. Music, worship space, paid off mortgage, outreach in the community, fellowship hall, grounds and landscaping, After the group finished this, we were asked to use our assets together in a way they had never been used in the past or present. It was amazing to see the Holy Spirit work with these groups.

To name a few ideas that the Spirit crafted:

- Invite church members and community in to learn about technology – how to use your phone or laptop.
- Invite middle school and high school groups in to display their art or perform their music.
- Join together with the preschool and Presbyterian Women to do a garage sale on a Saturday and then do the community picnic the following day, having the participants take the leftovers for free.
- Invite children and youth into learn how to play music either on recorders, ukuleles or guitars.
- Have prepared box dinners and welcome the community to drive through and pick it up for free.

All those who attended the meeting, please stand. I encourage you all to talk with these folks. We are gathered together finding ourselves in a time of transition. We are asking, “What comes next?” Where can we find the power of life in God’s Spirit for the life of John Knox? It is time for the wind to blow us in a new direction, for the fire to spark our creative ideas and the language to share them so that we can inspire each other.

Pentecost prayer by Jill Duffield –

Come, Holy Spirit, bring fires of justice to people right now exploited, devalued and oppressed. Come, Holy Spirit, bring winds of change to the farthest corners of the earth, ushering in God’s peace and abundant life.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring words of God’s deeds of power spoken in languages understood by all creation.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring news ways of being community, a revolution of grace, mercy and kindness that reveal the dignity and worth of each and every person.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring an upending of evil, an upbuilding of goodness, an upheaval of anything counter to the will of the Triune God.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring flames that burn away our dross and refine our faith so that the whole world will be drawn through us to the light of Christ and the love of God.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring truth that unmasks idolatry, undoes false teaching and leads to greater understanding among God’s children.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring reconciliation that breaks down walls, builds bonds of kinship and knits together every tribe and nation.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring comfort to those who mourn, relief to all who suffer, hope to the hopeless and encouragement to those on the cusp of giving up.

Come, Holy Spirit, bring your advocacy and intercession, your gentleness and power, your presence and compassion in order that we will be bravely participate in the new things God is doing in our midst.

Come, Holy Spirit, come that we may abide in God and God in us until Christ comes again. Amen.