



May 31, 2020

Pentecost

First Christian Church 1609 East Ash St. Goldsboro, NC 27530

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Weekly Conference Calls every Sunday at 9:45 AM and every Wednesday at 6:45 PM.
Here is all you do: Dial 712-770-5505 and then wait for instructions to enter access
code, which is 300904#.

June Newsletter Postponed a Few Days!

To give us time to make plans and inform you about our first outside
worship gathering, our June Newsletter will be postponed and will be sent
out by June 5. Thanks for your patience!

Welcome to Worship! Visit us online at www.firstchristiangoldsboro.org for
several videos posted by 9:00 AM each Sunday: our Sermon, our Old
Testament and Epistle Readings by Elders. Our lectionary readings this Sunday
are: Ps. 68:1-10, 32-35, Acts 1: 6-14, I Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11, and John 17:1-11.



Check our links to violin and piano concerts by Donna Griffin Davenport and
soon to some new musical medleys by our own Tom Casey!



Some of our graduates will be highlighted in our June newsletter which will go
out by June 5. If we did not receive your info about graduates in time for the
June newsletter, we will be glad to include in the July newsletter, so send any
pictures you have to Andrew (goacanes87@yahoo.com) and send info to Penny
at (pbziemer@gmail.com or 919-920-4192). Thanks!

Some addresses: Mary Ellen Ham at Willow Creek Nursing/Rehab Center Room 1007
2401 Wayne Memorial Drive Goldsboro, NC 27534 and
Mary Anne Cowley 225 West Park St. Cary, NC 27511

**"That Noisy Wind! That Uncontrollable Fire! That Different Crowd!
That's Pentecost!"**

Today the Spirit falls. Where will it land? And who will catch it? And where will that Spirit carry us? The Spirit has this power to transport us to places we might never imagine! The Christian tradition celebrates that during the Passover associated with the time of Good Friday, Jesus became the Passover Lamb, who died forgiving sin and loving his enemies. Fifty days after Passover, the scattered Jewish community will regather at Jerusalem for Pentecost, originally a celebration of the giving of the law to Moses and later as a harvest festival where first fruits were offered to God. In Christian tradition, Jesus is also remembered as the only begotten son, the perfect offering of God, the first fruits of God's grace. Pentecost comes again to recreate, re-ignite, reunite, and repurpose us.

First, Pentecost comes to recreate us. Sometimes, Pentecost is associated with the birth of the church, your birth, my birth, our birth. Just as God created all the world, God has come to remake us, through the wind of the Spirit that moves us out of the doldrums. When the Spirit of God moved across the face of the deep in creation, everything that wasn't became something enlivened by God's breath. You know that the Hebrew word for breath is the same as wind and Spirit. The same breath that swept over primeval chaos, now sweeps over our turmoil, whatever it is, bringing new life. This is no gentle breeze, for something stronger, like the rush of mighty wind is needed to clear away our deadness. The Spirit fills the whole place. Do you not long for the rush of this wind? Are we ready for God to unsettle what is familiar? Do we ever stifle the Spirit with our misplaced preoccupations? An old farmer from a country church was amused when the altar committee was upset when there was too much clanging at the communion table, believing this commotion disturbed the reverence of the moment. "Maybe so," the old farmer said, "but that little bit of noise might also make the Spirit feel more at home." If silence is a prerequisite for reverence, Pentecost was certainly irreverent! It was noisy and boisterous. The Spirit and that whole crowd didn't know how to use their inside voices! I have shared with some of you that I was filling in one Sunday at a small, Disciples church. To make the worship livelier, some of the leaders had covered an old funeral fan with paper, writing on one

side, "Praise the Lord!" and on the other side "Amen." I was told to hold up the different words at various points in the sermon to get some audience participation. A little way into the sermon at what I thought was an appropriate moment, " I held up "Praise the Lord!" It was the strangest thing. Without moving a muscle other than their diaphragms, they responded almost in one voice, "Praise the Lord." Well, alright. So, I preached on and at another point that might merit affirmation, I held up, "Amen." Once again, the whole church said, "Amen." "If this isn't something," I thought. So, I continued that way and then near the end, to add variety, I just twirled the thing around like a real fan. They were not quite sure what to do, but they were doing their part to prepare for the coming of the Spirit, though we know that all our fans can't orchestrate the Spirit, which will blow where it will, according to John. To be a Pentecost people, we need to be willing to say, "Come Holy Spirit, drive out the dead wood in our hearts and minds. Come, stir our hearts and bring life to the worship we bring you!" Tuesday night on our conference call, we had a guest from *Green Chalice*, Carol Devine, on the call. She shared that one of her professors used to say, "If you are *comfortable and Christian*, you are probably not doing something right." Are we willing to let God blow through our lives, our homes, our thoughts, and our actions? Are we willing to have God sweep away all we are clinging to? Are we willing to say to God, "Unsettle me if you need to. Just come. Please come."

Second, at Pentecost, God has come to re-ignite us. When we are moving too fast, we might hear this, "Where's the fire?" Early Thursday night, our fire alarm went off, blaring loudly. After we finally silenced it, Tom, Margaret, and I went outside. We smelled no smoke and saw none. We think it was faulty equipment. So, where's the fire in your life or home now? Just as God appeared to Moses early in Exodus as a bush which burned but was not consumed, the Spirit falls upon those gathered with tongues of fire. Fire in our hands is a great risk; what will we do with it? Sometimes we are tempted to say to God, "*You better think twice about giving this fire to us. You know how we like to play with it, you know all the ways we try to make it work for us, burning things - trees, animals, people, cities, countries, and planets. We might warm the house with fire or burn the house down with it. So, Lord, come share fire, rekindle us, re-ignite us, burn in our bones, warm the cold worry in our hearts, but think twice about completely turning it*

over to us." God brings fire to a world used to lukewarm, a world just looking for not too hot and not too cold. God brings fire at Pentecost to those who have known it and miss it and to those who don't know they are missing it because they've never known it, real transcendence, real fire. We still need a new fire to refine us, burning away all that is undesirable, even if we don't have the faintest idea what that means. The prophet Isaiah is willing to be used by God but troubled about not being worthy to bear God's message. Ever felt that way? When elders and deacons are asked to serve in the church, their first responses are usually, "I feel so inadequate to do that, so small behind that table." Isaiah felt that way too and cried out to God, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." God's response? An angel is sent to touch Isaiah's lips with burning coals! OK. Quite a graphic image, but it conveys the power of God to purify us for our real calling, our true purpose on this earth, whatever that is.

Third, at Pentecost, the Spirit comes to reunite us so we might be willing to cooperate in more profound ways and celebrate connections we never knew we had. Do you remember in Genesis when there is a plan to build a tower to the heavens? The Tower of Babel. At Babel, the humans spoke one language, yet they were united by the human desire to dethrone God. This rebellion results in divisiveness and scattering. At Pentecost, God's desire is to gather us all into one people, forgiven, converted, and empowered to form one holy community founded on Christ's sacrificial love.

This power to reunite us comes through the power of words. Just as God created the world through speaking, through the Word, Jesus Christ, who was sent out over the deep in the beginning, Pentecost descends as tongues. It was a noisy affair. Some thought the whole bunch was drunk. We aren't ready for Pentecost if we expect an event that will turn its participants in cookie cutter Christians who think, talk, dress, eat, speak, or worship the same way. Those who arrived divided by language, ethnicity, geography, and customs will leave with those same differences, but those differences will be drawn to one Lord and formed into one community, reunited by the Spirit as the Word is preached and as the Gospel is proclaimed! At Pentecost we have a gathering of quite different people; we have those native to the region and then we have Jews of the Diaspora. Diaspora means "scattering." After the fall of the Northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 721 BC, the conquerors deported many of the inhabitants of the northern

kingdom, cutting them off from each other. After the fall of the Southern kingdom to the Babylonians in 586 BC, many were transported miles from home to Babylon in what is usually referred to as the Exile, but a remnant was allowed to return some fifty years later. A large Jewish community lived in Egypt and we only have to hear the list of those gathered at Pentecost to get an idea of the diversity of the gathering. They were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and Rome. They were Cretans and Arabs. Now imagine that even within each of these groups, *there are multiple dialects. Yet, here is the amazing thing!* As Peter preached in his Galilean tongue, people who had no power to understand him nevertheless did understand what he was saying. I have read accounts of missionaries who were waiting for a translator to arrive so they could preach in a remote village. As they kept preaching, no one came, but in some accounts, the people describe how suddenly they heard the message in their own language. Someone did show up! I don't think you or I have the power to imagine all God might do through us if we would just surrender trying to do it on our own. Do you think the Galilean fisherman Peter who denied Christ three times could have ever dreamed he would be used by the Spirit to preach a sermon that would draw thousands to the church that day or perform the miracles Acts records?

This power to reunite us comes with the promise that we are better together than apart and that our differences are our strengths and gifts. Our human tendency is to divide ourselves off into clans and tribes, into camps of us versus them. The call of Pentecost is to let the Holy Spirit draw us back together. Differentiation is often a skill taught to young children and it is important, yet I also wonder what might happen if we focus too much on those exercises of giving a child three pictures which look similar and one which is obviously different. Could that encourage exclusion? Pentecost calls us to see difference not as the grounds for exclusion, but as the exciting revelation of our interconnectedness. The Gospel itself has a loud, outside voice which can be heard deep down in our souls calling us to repent for the ways we have broken relationship with God and neighbor through our sin. It also moves us to raise our voices as advocates to speak up for those who live broken lives.

This vision of unity Pentecost promises extends not just to humans, but to all of life. In our Advent meditation for 2019, *All We Need for Christmas*, I shared how those researching communication within the plant world used an instrument able to perceive the electromagnetic variations from the surface of the plant leaves to the root system and then translated these vibrations into sound. The idea of trees 'talking' to each other in some fashion is not as far-fetched as we might think. The roots of the forest trees are bound together and find their strength by sharing stored resources. Carol Devine shared Tuesday night even something more remarkable, noting that some of her readings reveal that "older trees send out nutrients and warnings to younger trees." Paul will go on to explore this idea of one body with many members. The hand does not need to look or function like the foot. If it did, our physical bodies would not work as well, or at all. And if we ever fall into the trap of undervaluing the importance of some members over others, we need only remember the little toe and how nearly impossible it is initially to maintain our balance without it. Or as our Moderator, Gary Bartlett, said in one sentence: "We are stronger together than we are apart." The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Spirit comes at Pentecost to restore words to their divine and prophetic purpose. In a time when words and speeches are comprised of contrived words torn from their holy origins and stripped of their divinity, in order to manipulate and deceive, Pentecost makes it possible to believe that words once again have the power to shine with the image of the God who created them and might once again reflect God's transcendence and go forth to transform all of life by God's grace.

The Spirit also comes at Pentecost to shatter our illusions about how and where the Spirit may move. I came to understand this one night years ago after I had been thinking about how fire and wind and earth are present in the Pentecost story, but water seemed to be absent, although we do know the waters of baptism do accompany conversion in many of the accounts in Acts. That night I dreamed I was riding in a vehicle between two people and we were crossing a bridge. I can't tell you how I knew, but I knew that God the Father was on one side and Jesus on the other. I asked, "So where is the Spirit?" and they motioned outside the vehicle to two tall, beautifully powerful, glimmering walls of water on either side of us. I remember after the fact wondering why I was not terrified, but I wasn't. "There," they said, "The Holy Spirit is there holding up those walls of water!" I

shared this dream with my sister in law, Mindy. (Let me mention in passing that Min is a trained psychoanalyst who uses dream interpretation in her therapy. She has steeped herself in the world of lucid dreaming and world religions and has written an exquisitely beautiful book which will touch many lives, maybe even yours, *The Secret Life of Dreams* by Melinda Powell). It was a dream I will never forget. Just as the Spirit parted the Red Sea, the Spirit is still there in our lives, keeping us safe in places we might never imagine, places beyond the sight of physical eyes, making it possible for us to navigate safely over treacherous seas. The Spirit is not confined to our waking hours, our minds, our theologies. The Spirit is free to go where it will.

Just as the Spirit comes at Pentecost to recreate, re-ignite, and reunite us, the Spirit also comes to repurpose us in these times. The Church has always known what it's like to be a scattered people, but in the days of COVID, we are experiencing a new diaspora. We are the one church gathered and scattered. Even after we start gathering physically, many will continue to stay connected by the Spirit using virtual formats to worship. The promise of Pentecost is that we are still one. The gentleman who had our closing prayer for our regional conference call Tuesday night, said this, "Some of us may gather in a building. Some will stay in our homes. I have pulled over just outside my daughter's home right now to pick up her WIFI just to be on this call. It doesn't matter because we all have one foundation, like the hymn we sing, "The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord!" Though we are scattered and physically separated, we are still grounded by the One who died loving and forgiving us and loving and forgiving his enemies - this Passover lamb who Romans 8 celebrates the Spirit of God raised from the dead Easter morning! *The gathered church must remind the scattered church that we are drawn into one life, one Body. The scattered church must remind the gathered church that we are drawn together to be sent out to let the wind carry us into the world, bearing a remarkable message of hope and promise and presence and solidarity and vision about who God calls us to be.*

The Spirit is calling us into a wonderful future! As I come near the end of this message, I also am coming to the end of my intentional interim at First Christian Church. I hope to continue my writings and meditations on a personal blog. (More info on that will be included later our website). I thank God for the power of the

Spirit which has carried me to places which have brought so much joy. I thank God for sending me to Emory University where I met a wonderful Californian carried by the Spirit all the way cross country to Atlanta, who continues to be the love of my life, Carey. When he arrived in Georgia, he needed tongues of fire to help him understand some of our Southern expressions! I thank God for blessing me with a wonderful family, my parents and grandparents, my Aunt Bobbie, two wonderful daughters Carolyn and Laura and sons-in-law, Chris and Tom, granddaughter Margaret Penny and grandson Charlie. I thank God for leading our family to Goldsboro and to First Christian, for learning much from my mentor Rev. Fred, for giving me the opportunity to teach and learn from thousands of students I was blessed to teach in a variety of college classes. I thank God for the many wonderful years of service at Carr Memorial in Sampson County. In 2018, I was called back to First Christian Goldsboro as an Intentional Interim when Rev. Fred Clarke accepted a call to South Carolina. That was nearly two years ago and though I missed my Clinton family when I left, what a joy it has been to return home to my Goldsboro family. It has been my blessing to serve this family that is so close to my heart. Now there a new gift for First Christian, a minister who you know is dear to my heart has been called, Rev. Tom Millay! We welcome the Spirit's wind, fire and Word leading us all forward. And so we go, we go led by that noisy wind, that uncontrollable fire; we go as that vastly differentiated community drawn by One Lord to be one body, recreated, re-ignited, reunited and repurposed to bear God's love to the world. *This Christ longs to be in relationship with you and invites you to live as one with him, the Father, the Spirit, and the community gathered by his love. Is the wind sweeping now across your life drawing you into this new life? Like Jeremiah, do you feel a new fire burning in your bones? Is this the moment these words are rising in you, "Come, Jesus. Come, Lord. Come Holy Spirit!" I woke up around 4:30 Saturday morning singing a song we know. Sing it with me now: "Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on all of us." May it be so!*



Prayers of the Parish: God, we thank you for the power of your Spirit to shape us into the people you have called us to be. Come with your breath, your fire, your word to transform us. Come with mercy to heal us. Come with strength to empower us! We thank you that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice of love to draw us closer to you. Please hear our prayers for (all those whom you have put on our hearts to care for).

Grace Price, Eloise Kleinert, Mary Ethel Lewis, Kathy and G. A. Spain, June Anderson, Willie and Faye Rogers, Rick Rogers (Faye & Willie Rogers' son), John and Becky Selzer, Teenie Wilson, Rebecca Daniels, Mary Ellen Ham, Lorraine Loch, Val Watkins (Brantley's sister-in-law), the Spain's great granddaughter Katie, Molly McEldowney (Sharon Jones' daughter) and her brother, David Reynolds, Robert Strader (June Anderson's son-in-law), Jodie Hudson, Eddie Stewart, Linda Hilburn, Lee Summerlin, Gary Bartlett, Bill Smith, Gordon Aycock (friend of June Anderson), Chuck Allen, and the Kleinert Family, Family of Dennis Horne in the death of his Aunt Linda Sides and Family of Ruby Santee in the death of her sister, Margaret Medlin, Melissa Acres, Mary Anne Cowley, Mary Ellen Ham, Ruby Santee, Linda McCoy

We ask that you keep us safe from COVID 19 and protect those who have suffered in many ways from this pandemic. We ask for wisdom to make decisions that keep us safe and bring glory to you. We offer a special lament this week as the death toll exceeds 100,000 in our country alone. In this difficult time, please hear all our spoken and unspoken prayers in Jesus' name, Amen.

Communion You may pick up individual communion packs at the entry table at the parking lot entrance Mondays from 10 to 12 or Tuesdays from 10 to 12 or use your own bread and juice at home. You may also drop off your offerings at that time.

A Moment for Meditation Communion is not just a physical thing. As Christians, as people living in the wake of Pentecost, we of all people should know about spiritual communion. The disciples were physically close to Jesus, living day-in-day-out with him, yet they didn't really know who he was during this time. They didn't have spiritual communion with him. It is only after Jesus' ascension, when the Holy Spirit comes and enlightens the minds of the disciples and makes them apostles, that they really know who Jesus is. This doesn't mean going without physical communion is easy. That is why the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. But we Christians have been given the possibility, even if it isn't easy, of overcoming physical distance to still truly and spiritually commune with one another. That is what the communion of the saints, made up of all those who are alive and all those who are dead, is about. We are never alone. May God remind us of this, comfort us, and strengthen us for our journey.

Preparing the Lord's Table with Our Offerings - Let us now prepare the Lord's Table with our Offerings. Thank you for your faithfulness in sharing your offerings during this time. You may drop them *by the church office from 10 to 12 on Monday or Tuesday of each week, by calling Wanda for another time, or by mailing in.*

Prayer for the Offering

Words of Institution - On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my Body broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me." In the same manner after supper, Jesus took the Cup and when he had blessed it, he gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my blood of a new covenant, poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it in remembrance of him."

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

The Lord's Prayer Let us now pray together the prayer our Lord taught us, saying:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction Prayer

Now comes the time to be sent out into the world. But if the Spirit is not the one who sends us, all our work is in vain. Send us out, Holy Spirit, to do your work in the world. Grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unit of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Announcements and Calendar

NC Regional Assembly Business Session on Zoom, June 6 from 10 AM to Noon

Board Meeting, Tuesday, June 9, 6:45 PM on our Conference Call

Elders Meeting, Thursday, June 25, 6:45 (Conference Call or ZOOM, will be announced later)

Outside Gathering on Sunday Morning, Day and Time TBA

