

Sermon for Pentecost
Sunday, June 5, 2022
“The Pentecost Experience”

Text: Acts 2:1-21

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Day of Pentecost represents the final manifestation of the fullness of God in God’s three natures. Christ’s presence on earth gave to humanity a renewed understanding of what our relationship is between us and God the Creator, and how that translates into our relationships with each other. God’s manifestation in Christ is about relationship, but God’s manifestation by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is about experience. It is through our experience of God that God is made real to us.

On the day of Pentecost, Jerusalem was bursting with holy energy! You see, fifty days after Passover comes the Jewish festival of Shavu’ot. According to the Book of Leviticus, there was to be a festival of the first fruits the day after seven Sabbaths had passed. 7 weeks = 49 days + 1 day = 50 days. That is the day of Shavu’ot, or the Festival of Weeks. People had come to Jerusalem from all over the known world to celebrate the Festival of Weeks. In Koine Greek, which was spoken during the time of Jesus and the first apostles, Shavu’ot was called ‘*pentecostē*’, which means fifty. Our celebration Pentecost has its origins in that festival. And from among that gathering of devout Jews, the Holy Spirit descended upon them; they heard a message from God each in their own language:

“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.”

On that day, people from diverse cultures and languages heard and understood a universal message. I imagine the Pentecost moment to have been as though I were speaking to you in Cherokee, but you heard it in whatever your native tongue was. Or imagine being in a room full of people all speaking a different language, but you heard and understood everyone else in your own language. That’s the miracle of Pentecost. Where God had confused the language of humans at the Tower of Babel, he made humans comprehend each other at Pentecost.

Now, it is important to understand that the Holy Spirit of God, as one of the three natures of God, has always been; it’s not as though prior to Pentecost there was no Holy Spirit. References to God’s spirit are found in the ancient Hebrew scriptures, which we know as the Old Testament, from the very beginning at creation when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, throughout human history. But the Day of Pentecost was a particular moment in time when humans recognized this nature

of God in a new way; they experienced God in a way that was fresh, energizing, and stimulating. For the brand new community of followers of Jesus Christ, Pentecost was like the jolt that they needed to continue the teaching, preaching, and healing that Jesus began during his time on earth.

Many Christian traditions experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. In Episcopal or Anglican Church tradition and in other catholic traditions like ours, we show our experience of the Holy Spirit in the ways that the Holy Spirit changes and transforms ordinary things and people. That is the essence of our sacramental life, and we are sacramental churches. All of our sacraments call on the Holy Spirit to descend upon us to make a fundamental, spiritual change. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, ordinary bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, and we are spiritually renewed and regenerated. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, ordinary women and men are ontologically changed at Ordination into vessels for God, proclaimers of the gospel, and stewards of the sacraments. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, we are inspired to renew our commitment to God at Confirmation. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, our mistakes are forgiven in the Sacrament of Confession and our relationship with God is restored. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, two persons who love each other become one in marriage and together manifest the love of God. When the Holy Spirit comes among us, ordinary oil is transformed into a balm that brings healing to our sick, broken, and battered bodies, minds, and spirits. And when the Holy Spirit comes among us, ordinary water is transformed into the wellspring of life, which is poured over us at Baptism, makes us members of the body of Christ, gives us a new identity as children of God, and guarantees us the inheritance of eternal salvation.

Our entire sacramental life springs from the waters of baptism and is what connects us to what happens at the altar; there is a straight path from the font to the altar. When we baptize infants and young children, we welcome them into the Christian family, and we make promises to teach our faith and our traditions to them as they grow, until they are old enough to make that commitment for themselves at Confirmation. When we baptize adults, they make those promises for themselves. When we administer the Sacrament of Baptism, we ask the Holy Spirit to come among us and transform the catechumen into a new creature. He/she takes on a new identity as a member of the Body of Christ.

Pentecost marks the end of the Great Fifty Days of Easter. We change the liturgical colors, we stop saying Alleluia as much, but Pentecost isn't the end of the story. It is, in fact, the beginning. It is the beginning of the Christian story that we have been commanded by Jesus Christ himself to tell and share the experience of the transcendent God among us and to share the message of love, respect, and renewal that he brought to us. Life is so full of uncertainty, change, and chaos. Sometimes we may think we have it all in control, but we really don't. Sometimes we may think that others are in control, and they may be for a time, but in the end, they aren't. Ultimately, God is in control

and he wants his creation to live in the beauty of his kingdom and to trust him in his faithfulness and love. Pentecost reminds us that God has been with us since the beginning of time and will be with us always. In his Pentecost sermon this morning, Pope Francis, the Patriarch of the Apostolic See of Rome said that the Holy Spirit helps us to know that God has confidence in us even when we don't have confidence in ourselves; the Holy Spirit helps us know that we are loved by God.

Pentecost is about an experience—how we experience God in our lives, how he moves us and transforms us. Paul said in his First Letter to the Corinthians that there are varieties of gifts given to us by the Spirit. We all have gifts that we are supposed to use to share our experience of God. Pentecost is about how we can use our gifts and share our experience of God to go out and transform the world. Amen.