

May 24, 2015



“New Life for All”

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

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 nation 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: ‘Men of Judea 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.”

What a day! For fifty days after Easter, the resurrected Christ appeared to the disciples and then ascended into heaven. And now the gift of the Holy Spirit is given--the Advocate, the Comforter, God present with us always to empower and to sustain.

On the great day of Pentecost, the day called “the birthday of the church,” the faithful from all over the inhabited world had gathered in one place and God poured out the Holy Spirit upon them. There was so much energy and power in that place that day that they said it was like the wind was blowing right through them and the air itself was electrified with what looked like fire.

Just as Jesus had said would happen, God sent the Holy Spirit and from that day forward the church was born of water and the Spirit. The church—created by God to be the body of Christ throughout the earth. The church—blessed, forgiven, sanctified in the waters of baptism. The church—enlivened, empowered, infused with the power of the Holy Spirit. The church—opening hearts, opening minds, opening doors, that the world might behold the love and peace and justice of God available for each one and for them all.

The newly born church was something quite remarkable indeed, right from the beginning. We hear that gathered in that place on the first Pentecost were devout believers from every nation. All the languages and cultures of the world were represented. And when the Spirit came to them, lo and behold, they spoke and they all heard and understood, each in their own language. All the divisions of language, culture, homeland and tradition were superseded and made whole. God’s intended beloved community was reunited, the bond of unity restored, the cloth of the fabric of life mended.

The church: one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

As Alejandro read it so well for us, could you see them all in your mind’s eye, that rich and beautiful and widely diverse assemblage of God’s people—the Medes and the Parthians, the Elamites and the Capadocians. They were all there and they didn’t have any trouble completely understanding one another. Today we would say—the Salvadoreños, the Samoans, and the Mexicans. The Vietnamese, the Armenians, the Greeks and the Filipinos. The Jamaicans and the Anglos. The Chinese, the Koreans, north and south, the Israelis and the Palestinians. The Kenyans and the Egyptians, the South Africans and the Brazilians of all hues. They were all there, and so many more. And they were united in one love, one hope.

And as he read, did you hear another kind of diversity, too? The old and the young, they were there, and there was a place for everyone.

“Your young people shall prophesy. Your youth shall see visions. And your elders shall dream dreams.” In Bible-speak this means that the dreams of the elders will be filled with messages from God. And the eyes and

hearts of the youth will open to seeing God. God will reveal to them all, old and young, through the stories of their dreams and the insights of their hearts, what God intends for their lives and for this earth.

God is working in us all—old and young and everyone in between—to bring forth a new future, a future with hope.

How will we hear it? “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” the Bible says— they hear God speaking to them and as they speak and live that word they become part of the great chain of generations keeping God’s people on track, faithful, serving God’s people, being the hope. They shall speak God’s word for our time. Did we not see this for ourselves in the faces of our confirmands last Sunday?

The imagery and energy of Pentecost is wild and strong. Indeed, this is God doing special effects in a big way. Not only to dazzle and get our attention—but to draw us into the new identity God is creating for us. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, power as of wind and fire, is breathing new life into us and forging us into a new body, the church.

The church is born and disciples are created. “I am making of you a new people,” God is saying through all this. Through the Holy Spirit, I am reviving you and unifying you to become one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit charges us up with the power to be Christ’s disciples in the world, for the world. But what are disciples? What are we to be? How are we to be in ministry to all the world? Let’s look at four facets of our new identity.

We disciples are to be, first of all, evangelists, sharing the good news of God in Christ wherever we go. The good news that God knows us, and loves us still.

What a blessing for us each and all. How we long to hear it and receive it, again and again as we go through this life. Especially all those who are heavy laden, those whose self-esteem is sinking low, those whose hope is wavering and weak. We offer good news for those who are suffering anywhere from the scourge of poverty, homelessness, or war, those whose homes have been swept away by tornadoes or floods—this is the message of God’s great good news that we disciple evangelists proclaim with our words and with our lives. God knows us, loves us, and through the power of the Holy Spirit will heal us and set us free.

Next, we disciples are to be involved in the work of ministry. We are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be those who love, affirm, heal, bless and encourage. We are called to set one another free from whatever keeps us from being the fullness of who God creates us to be. In ministry, as the hands and feet of Christ in the world now, we disciple ministers are called to reach out in love to all the people of our community, especially mindful of the needs of those often most vulnerable: children, youth and seniors.

And disciples are sent forth in mission. Those first disciples were sent out to Rome and across the Mediterranean to all the farthest corners of the earth. Still today, the Spirit’s call to mission sends us from this congregation—the young and the not-so-young-- to New Orleans and Haiti. Through the larger United Methodist Church, the Spirit sends us to Nepal and everywhere in this world where there is need. It sends us into hospitals and classrooms and prisons. It sets us side by side with the homeless and with those nearing the end of their sojourn here on earth. In mission we build houses, we dig wells, we give books, we send health kits, we stock the food pantry, we sew quilts, we tutor kids. In mission, we disciples share the love of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, with neighbors near and far.

Finally, through the power of the Holy Spirit, disciples are called to be prophetic. Prophecy happens when the people of God speak up for what is right and true. Prophecy happens when the people of God insist that all people be treated equally and fairly. Prophecy happens when the people of God call for love and compassion in every situation of human suffering and need. Prophecy happens when through God’s people, God calls us back to our deepest values and most cherished commitments amidst the temptations and distractions of our day.

On that first Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus Christ were given power to be evangelists, to be in ministry, to be in mission, and to be prophets, all that the saving work of God in Christ might continue in the world for the transformation of the world.

And how did those first disciples respond in order to be open and receptive to this life-changing power?

They prayed. They prayed mightily and unceasingly that God's Spirit might enter their lives and warm their hearts and fill them with love and power. They stuck together. They were of one accord, not claiming more or thinking more highly of themselves than of others. The hallmarks of their community, as we have seen, were understanding, sharing, mutual trust, self-sacrifice, affirmation, and joy.

And finally, they accepted responsibility for being Christ's body in the world, to live so that people would look at them and see God's love, see a sign of God's reign.

They chose to commit themselves to live as people who believe that God's will can be accomplished in this world. They were determined to stay together, to pray together, to worship together, to serve together. They committed together to be the church, so that God's purposes from everlasting to everlasting would be made manifest through them while God gave them life and breath, wind and fire.

We are the heirs of those first Pentecost Day disciples. We stand on their shoulders. We are the generations they dreamed for the future.

For whatever challenges we face today, in our time, whatever changes we experience in church and in society, we know that God's Word is true and God's promises are sure. The Holy Spirit charges us up with all the power of wind and fire to be Christ's disciples in the world, for the world.

The Apostle Paul described it this way to the early disciples in Ephesus. Many of you will recognize these words as my favorite Benediction. This is Paul's testimony to the church of the awesome life-saving, world-transforming wind and fire power of the Holy Spirit: "by the power at work within us, God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

May the power of the Holy Spirit renew us this day, lift us up, and send us forth.

Amen.