

May 31, 2020 Pentecost Day

Acts 2:1-21

Living Into Reality



Can you imagine this: The disciples are gathered for worship, as was their custom—to celebrate this Old Testament feast called Pentecost. They've brought with them some food—food was part of all their gatherings (kind of like Lutherans) bread and some wine, and perhaps some olives or a few pieces of broiled fish. They arrive at the specified location, greet one another with the kiss of peace, and then begin their simple and intimate worship service. One of them reads from the Hebrew Scriptures, another offers a meditation and all of them share in the communal meal.

But all of a sudden, a violent rush of wind bursts into the room and flames descend upon the heads of the disciples! They try to communicate what is happening, only to discover that they are all speaking different language! The commotion in the house where the disciples are gathered is so loud that it quickly draws the attention of the people outside. As a crowd gathers and sees what is happening, many are amazed.

"What does this mean?" some wonder. Others approach the scene with a healthy dose of skepticism: "They are filled with new wine," they scoffed. In other words, "They're drunk."

Just then, Peter jumps up and says something to the effect of, "Hey, we're not drunk. It's only 9 o'clock in the morning. What has happened to us isn't because we're full of wine, it's because we're full of the Spirit!" Peter

continues, repeating the prophet Joel's foretelling of the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh.

In the two millennia that have passed since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that first Day of Pentecost, Christians have associated this day with the beginning of Christianity as its own distinct religion – the experience of God doing a profoundly new thing.

Through the centuries, this day has become a celebration of that new thing – a celebration of something that happened a long, long time ago. After all, we've come here today to read ancient scripture about an ancient event, and aside from the fact that we are in our individual homes rather than all in one place, our worship isn't all that different.

But when Pentecost becomes just another nice, neat conclusion to a story that began thousands of years ago; or just another nice, neat liturgical celebration of something that happened a long, long time ago, it loses its ability to speak to us in the here-and-now. It loses its power. And Jesus had told them that the point of Pentecost was power. *"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).*

Imagine a Sunday sometime in the future. Restrictions are lifted. The weather is getting warmer, the flowers are blooming and plans are being made for summer vacations. The faithful gather here at St. Matthew for the annual observance of Pentecost.

The worship bulletins are proofed, folded and distributed with a caring smile; the baptismal font is adorned and prepared for the congregation to renew their baptismal vows; and the red paraments have been set out on the altar for the morning's services.

The music begins to play, the people begin to sing, and I begin to make my way down the aisle when, all of a sudden, a violent rush of wind bursts into the sanctuary and flames descend upon the heads of everyone who has gathered for worship! And just as the faithful attempt to put the experience into words, they realize that everyone is speaking a different language!

Of course, we can be assured of two things: If that happens here on some future Pentecost Day, all of us will make the five o' clock news and

somebody is going to be having a lengthy chat with the District president. Things like that just don't happen anymore, right?

But what is still happening is that, just as they were 2,000 years ago, people are still crying out for salvation—eternal salvation and salvation in all sorts of other forms. Everywhere we look, people are imprisoned – physically, mentally and emotionally – behind walls of depression and loneliness and addiction, shackled with burdens that keep them from living into their identity as beloved children of God.

The cry for salvation is not a simple problem with a simple solution; it is a deep, guttural groaning for deliverance. It is a cry that the quick and easy formula of "Say these six words and the rest of your life will turn out OK" can't hush. It is a cry that a date on a calendar or a memorial of what happened a long time ago can't soothe. And it is a cry that Christians who are content to let somebody else do the hard and dirty work can't pacify. No, this cry can only be answered with a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit – a Pentecost right here in our midst!

But that's impossible, right? Rushing winds and howling storms and spontaneously learning to speak different languages – the whole bit – that just doesn't happen anymore, right?

Well *maybe* it doesn't happen anymore. But that's not the question Pentecost dares us to ask.

The question Pentecost dares us to ask is, *Could* it happen?

Could a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit happen?

Well, chances are that if we sit and wait for the Holy Spirit to send fire and wind and all of the trappings we've come to associate with the first Pentecost, we are going to be disappointed. But if we allow ourselves to imagine what a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit might look like, we may be surprised at what we find.

This isn't something we wait for. This is something we live. And by living it, we make it a reality.

If I tell one of my kids, "Go do your homework," he is not going to come back to me a couple of hours later and say, "Hey Dad, I memorized what you said. You said, "Go do your homework." And he's not going to say, "Hey Dad, I can say "do your homework" in Greek, Latin and Hebrew." I

might be duly impressed, but not satisfied. And he's not going to say, "Hey Dad, I'm getting a group of friends together and we're going to study what it would look like if I did my homework." That's not going to work. None of it is going to work. And it doesn't work with Pentecost either. Pentecost must be lived to be a reality.

Maybe a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit causes us to approach a long-severed relationship with a loved one with new hope and fresh patience. Perhaps a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit nudges us to commit to a ministry – either here at the church or in the community. Or it could be that a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit draws us into a deeper, stronger, more life-giving relationship with God.

The Day of Pentecost calls us to keep watch – to imagine what a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit might look like in our own lives—*and* to live it out in God's power. Of course, if we sit and wait for the same old thing to happen, we'll always get what we ask for. But if we allow ourselves to imagine something new, something fresh, something holy, then anything is possible.

God promises, not that the Holy Spirit was poured out a long, long time ago; not that the Holy Spirit might be poured out a little bit, here and there, on a chosen few; but that the Holy Spirit *will* be poured out upon *all* flesh and that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved!

Can you imagine that? Better yet, can you live that?

Known by **LOVE**

Live by **FAITH**

Voice of **HOPE**