

NEW TESTAMENT READING: Acts 2:1-21

pg 119 NT

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>‘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. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

SECOND READING: Romans 8:22-27

<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. <sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

## ***“God’s Language”***

The psalmist of old sang, *“Our God comes, God does not keep silence, Before him is a devouring fire, Round about him a mighty tempest.”* (Ps 50:30) And, indeed, God the Holy Spirit came. The Spirit burst on the scene, hundreds of years after this psalmist sang. The Spirit came to Jerusalem, 50 days after Passover, in the year that Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Luke uses extravagant language to describe the event, but how else could he do it...something so strange, beyond the bounds of imagination, so miraculous, and mysterious?

The story goes like this: It was dawn, and the followers of Jesus were still gathered in an upper room, waiting, and praying, as they had done every day since the Ascension. But then, on this otherwise quiet morning, there was an eruption of sound and of wind. It must have seemed that the world was coming loose; breaking open. Then, what was heard became visible. “Tongues like fire” came to hover over the disciples’ heads. And these “tongues” then expanded into tongues of speech. The disciples began speaking in other languages!<sup>1</sup>

A crowd gathered. It consisted of people from every nation who were in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish Feast of Weeks, otherwise known as Pentecost. The people were bewildered because, from the street outside, the languages they heard being spoken by these simple Galileans were their own various tongues, and they understood what was being said!

Some of them, in an effort to explain it all away, accused the disciples of being drunk. But many wanted to know more. Their questions spurred Peter to preach...And Peter did. He told them the good news of Jesus Christ. The Church was born. As Wil Willamon says, *“A new wind was set loose upon the earth, provoking a storm of wrath and confusion for some, but clarity, understanding, and a fresh breath of hope and empowerment for others.”*<sup>2</sup>

A new wind was set loose. (*Pause*) You know, it is said that most mainline Protestants these days are uncomfortable with the very idea of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> We’re OK when we think of God’s Spirit as a soft but insistent voice inside of us, *like a clock that is ticking...one we have to be still to hear.* And we’re OK when we think of God’s Spirit as the shy, quiet one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Will Willamon, eds May, Miller, Achtemeier. *Acts. Interpretation.* (Atlanta: JKP; 1988), 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> Wil Willamon.

<sup>3</sup> John Buchanan. Sermon: *“Listen”* <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2001/060301.html>. (accessed 6/1/2017).

Trinity. But when the Spirit is disruptive like this, coming to us loudly and aggressively as at Pentecost, it all conflicts with our sense of decency and order”. *I think I’ve told this story before, but it deserves repeating, about a woman who wandered into a Presbyterian church service, which was already underway. Everything was going according to plan: hymns, prayers, readings. When the minister stood up in the pulpit and began to preach, however, the woman became suddenly very animated and responsive. “Yes,” she said out loud. “Praise the Lord”, “Amen, brother”. As she got louder people began to shuffle and squirm uneasily in their pews. Some turned around to see who was doing this thing. Eventually an usher, discreetly approached her and whispered, “Ma’am is there something wrong?” “Why no,” she said, “I’ve got the Spirit!” He responded, “Well, you didn’t get it here.”*<sup>4</sup>

Ha. Well sometimes, the Spirit does come boldly, assertively, disruptively. And sometimes the Spirit surprises us by coming with different purposes in mind than we expect. As our Litany today says, the Spirit sometimes animates, sometimes transforms, creates, comforts, teaches, advocates, empowers, and sometimes the Spirit comes to unify. Yes, the Spirit unifies. In the Pentecost story, we see the Spirit unifying the people through the giving of two gifts. The first gift is the gift of “listening”...the gift of listening, hearing, understanding.

Luke takes great effort to describe people of the whole world being there, people with marvelous diversity...Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, and so on. And he records that by the Spirit’s power, these people were able to transcend their individual differences of race, and culture and especially language to be able to hear and understand each other. But more than that they were able to transcend their diversity to hear and understand God’s language! *Rev. Peter Gomes says that “at Pentecost, diversity was overcome by a power that transcended it, the power to understand, to hear the wonderful works of God in their own language, their own accent, their own dialect.”* He continues, *“This did not reduce the people’s diverse identity, their particularity, but made them more than they had been. They became one with all those others who heard that God was alive, active in this world, and eager*

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<sup>4</sup> John Buchanan.

*for them to participate in God's purposes.*"<sup>5</sup> Yes, the Spirit unifies by giving us the ability to listen, to hear and understand that the good news is for everyone.

It would be good for us to listen and hear this, these days, don't you think? It would be good for us to simply hear the Spirit blowing through our land, our land with its great diversity...not only in its different races, cultures, economics, languages, and places of origins, but also diversity in opinions...opinions on about everything. Some people are against abortion, some people are against it with exceptions and for some, it's a matter of personal freedom, some people's mantra is "Black Lives Matter", some people's mantra is "All Lives Matter", some say ban automatic weapons, some insist they're needed for protection from the guns on the streets, some people say books of all history need be read, others say only certain books. Sadly and sinfully, our diverse opinions results in distant camps of angry finger-pointing people and paralyzing conflict. Ah, yes, it would be a good thing for our country, long ago broken from being whole, to listen to God's word, his living Word, and realize that we are all equally loved, and that all of us have in common the gracious gift of a forgiven and free life with and in him forever. The realization would itself be healing and unifying.

And....that brings us to the second gift that the Spirit gives in accomplishing the overarching purpose of unifying. That gift is the ability to speak. This Spirit gifts us with the ability to speak with our mouths and our hands. As 1 John 3:18 says, "*Love not only in word or speech, but in truth and action.*" We are given the opportunity to heal our brokenness by responding to God's message of love of all with love for all.

Last week, at this time, we were, all of us, broken-hearted, reeling from the tragedy in Uvalde, on the heels of Buffalo and Laguna Woods. Now there's been 20 more!<sup>6</sup> More mass shootings than days of the year thus far. It's hard to take in, to breathe isn't it? Friends, there's a language of hate and violence out there that feeds vulnerable, sick minds, minds who hunt down, who target innocents in shopping malls, in classrooms, anywhere. There are other languages too...ones that say, "It's all about me...take, take, take, amass as much as possible no

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Gomes. "*The Gift of Understanding*" In: Sermons (New York: William Morrow & Co, Inc.; 1998), 100-101

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.newsnationnow.com/us-news/tulsa-marks-20-mass-shootings-since-ualde/>

matter who it hurts”, ones that say, “those who are not like me, I need to put them down, keep them away, not let them in”. These languages, friends, need to be drowned out. They need be silenced! And they can only be so by a single unified loud voice, by the voice of a whole united people speaking, shouting, screaming a single message ...the message of love and care and protection of neighbor, of justice for the weak, voiceless and vulnerable, of the right for peace and beauty and joy in life for all of God’ creatures. As Rev. Jacqui Lewis says, *“If we, who are called to be the hands and feet of God’s heartbeat on earth, can hear that God’s love and grace is for everyone, we can also then translate the gospel into actions of love which are the antidotes to hate and which correct that which stands against justice and which divides”*.<sup>7</sup>

*(Pause)* You know, we get glimpses of this working when diverse people come together to respond to a crisis, say a natural disaster like a hurricane or tornado or the like. People roll up their sleeves, empty their wallets, sacrifice enormously for very different people, strangers in need. They open their homes and their arms in beautiful sometimes amazing ways. What is happening? What is going on when this happens? Well, the language of God, of love, is being spoken. The Spirit is inspiring unity through its gifts. Just as at the first Pentecost, diversity is being overcome by *a power that transcends it, the power to understand, to hear of God’s love and make people more than they’ve been. The new wind, that has been set loose upon the earth, is provoking understanding, and a fresh breath of hope and empowerment. The suffering ones become one with the helpers who are hearing that God is alive, God active in this world, and God is eager for them care for each other.*” Imagine, brothers and sisters, if, this language could be sustained, always spoken? Imagine!

Yes, my friends, our job as Christ’s Church is to receive the gifts of the Spirit, to hear the language of God, of love, and then to speak it to a hurting and divided world, thereby accomplishing a unity of God’s people in and for him. Praise God. Praise God. *“Our God has come. God has not kept silent. Before him is a devouring fire. Round about him a mighty tempest.”* Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Jacqui Lewis. *“Speaking in Tongues”*. <https://asermonforeversunday.com/sermons/c28-pentecost-sunday-year-c-2022/> (accessed 6-3-2022).