

The Day of Pentecost, May 31, 2020
Living Faith Lutheran Church

GATHERING

Gathering Song #403 “Like the Murmur of the Dove’s Song”

Like the murmur of the dove’s song, like the challenge of her flight,
like the vigor of the wind’s rush, like the new flame’s eager might;
come, Holy Spirit, come.

To the members of Christ’s body, to the branches of the vine,
to the church in faith assembled, to the midst as gift and sign;
come, Holy Spirit, come.

With the healing of division, with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
with the pow’r to love and witness, with the peace beyond compare;
come, Holy Spirit, come.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the companionship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

O God, on this day you open the hearts of your faithful people
by sending us your Holy Spirit. Direct us by the light of that Spirit,
that we may have a right judgement in all things
and rejoice at all times in your peace, through Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

First Reading Acts 2:1-21

(Be not afraid of all the hard-to-pronounce names. Just do your best)

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native

language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷In 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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Second Reading I Corinthians 12:3b-13

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Song before the Gospel reading

#399 “O Holy Spirit, Root of Life”

O Holy, Spirit, root of life, creator, cleanser of all things;
anoint our wounds, awaken us with lustrous movement of your wings.

Eternal vigor, Saving One, you free us by your living Word,
becoming flesh to wear our pain, and all creation is restored.

O holy Wisdom, soaring pow’r, encompass us with wings unfurled,
and carry us, encircling all above, below, and through the world.

Holy Gospel John 20:19-23

⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Sermon

Feast of Pentecost, May 31, 2020

LFLC

All of us, I am sure, have seen a story on TV about some terrible event
and watched a reporter shove a microphone
into the face of one of the victims and ask:
“How did you feel when such and such happened?”

And the person being interviewed—
in struggling to articulate the enormity of the experience—
the interviewee will often use similes—
that is, figures of speech--which use
the terms of comparison “like” or “as”—
such as: “Well, it was ‘like’ this”. . .or “It was ‘like’ that”
or “It was ‘as if’ this happened or “as if” that was happening.”

So it is with the first Pentecost.

The friends of Jesus gather together to wait.

Now, they don’t know what they are waiting for,
but they are waiting nonetheless.

And they are waiting, essentially, because he told them to. . .
and because they trust him.

After all, he said he would die, and he did;
he said he would rise from the dead, and he did;
and he told them to wait, and so they do.

Now, in the past 50 days since his resurrection,
the Master appeared among them
quietly and without much fanfare.
All of a sudden, he would simply be there.

He would talk a little; maybe have a bite to eat;
speak a blessing or some word of grace,
and then would simply NOT be there.

Ten days ago, on the mountaintop, they are given to believe
that these kind of appearances will be no more.
Oh, he says that he will be with them even after he leaves them,
but he doesn't elaborate on how or in what way—
and so they wait. And then it happens.

Now, exactly what happens is difficult to describe—which is why, decades later,
in telling the author, Luke, about the events of that day—
why his sources use similes such as these:

“There came from the sky a noise **like** that of a strong, driving wind. . .
and there appeared tongues **like** flames of fire.”
It wasn't really those things. . .but it was **like** that.
And then it was over. . .and the moment of that encounter passed.

But, just as when something wonderful happens to you
and you can't wait to share it with someone else. . .
so the disciples leave the place where they are
and move out into the courtyards and backyards of the city
to try, in some halting way, to let others know what they now know--
namely, that the crucified and risen Jesus is alive, is present, is in control.

In addition, as a final proof to them that this stunning experience of theirs
is of God, the disciples discover to their utter amazement
that the incredible range of people and languages spoken by those listening
understands what the disciples are saying.

Recognizing that, Jesus' followers suddenly realize
that this inexplicable understanding is taking place
only because of the same power of God
that now fills, energizes and inspires them.

To be sure, there are a few in the crowd who dismiss the disciples' words
as the lunatic ravings of drunks, but it is clear to the bulk of those present
that something extraordinary has taken hold
of this religious community. . .

a community which, by all rights, should be distressed and demoralized
but which is, quite obviously, neither—and is, instead,
under the influence of some immense excitement
and in the grip of some supreme power.

Over 20 centuries have passed since that day,
and there are those among us who know that what happened back then
was neither madness nor illusion
but was indeed the handiwork of God. . .
an encounter with the presence of the Divine.
And the reason we know that is because the same kind of thing
still happens today to people we know. . . even, maybe, maybe, to us.

Indeed, I could recount some of those stories
which a few of you have shared with me,
but such a listing of these spiritual encounters—
whether frightening or consoling—is not my intent this morning.

Instead, what I want to do today is to remind you
of these two very basic truths:

First, that the Holy Spirit is still working and active today—
that the miracle of Pentecost is not some old, dusty relic
which the church drags out of the attic once a year
the way that old men, like me,
rehash stories from their childhood
that everybody else in the family has already heard 60 times.

On the contrary: The story of the Holy Spirit's activity
is as up-to-date as this morning's edition of BBC online. . .
or the CBC or CTV news sites. . .
because the Holy Spirit is still opening people's hearts
and changing people's lives.

And those stories of our connecting with the Divine. . .
stories which have given or continue to give meaning to our lives. . .
personal stories about "Where we have seen God in our lives"
or "How we experienced the presence of God this past week"—
stories like that still need to be told. . .

told to those we love who may have never heard them before. . .
or told to friends or neighbours in conversations with them
in response to their asking us something like this:
“Why **do** you go to church?” “What do you get out of it?”

And then there’s that really hard question some are asking ourselves these days:
“Will I. . .will you. . .will we want or need to go back to church
when this whole lockdown is over and we’ve gotten out of the habit
of driving to worship in a building across town on Sunday morning
because we have found that sitting on the porch or patio
or at the kitchen table, drinking a cup of coffee, while reading a service
or watching a video of the sermon—since that seems to do the job just fine?”

True, we miss our friends and relationships with others in the congregation,
but it could be that meeting up with them for lunch
or over a coffee at Timmie’s or inviting them to dinner
might just fill the need and desire for their company. . .
and, as a bonus, we don’t have bump into or chat with those folks
we aren’t really all that interested in talking to. . .or they to us either.

Look, we all know that these are different and difficult times for the church--
and not just because of the lockdown or restrictions either,
but because the church—that rusty and crusty institution
with its old way of doing church and of being church—

with that endless focus on how and why we need buildings and budgets
and meetings and duties and responsibilities and custodial services
and hydro bills and paying clergy salaries and housing allowances--
that focus on and obsession with either thriving. . .or just surviving--
that’s been going the way of the dinosaur for some time now,
and maybe, like the dinosaur, will one day be gone forever.

That doesn’t mean the church is dying, but the institution is in great distress.
And if we ever needed or need proof of that,
just look around at church buildings all over the western world
and the northern hemisphere on Sunday morning
and see that most of the heads in it
are gray or balding or nodding. . .
either nodding in agreement with something
they already know well from hearing it over and over again. . .
or nodding off to sleep because nothing is ever, or rarely, said
that is new or fresh, challenging or life-changing.

The reality is that most people today, in our societies anyway, under the age of 60
aren't all that interested in the church because they don't have much,
if any, connection to God; no real understanding
of what God means to a person's life. .
and nobody they trust who will share with them
the story of how God is at work in people's lives;

which means that you and I may need to be the ones
to share that story. . .to share our stories with them. . .
and so help them understand, at least a little,
that a relationship with God matters us to us. . .makes a difference to us.

That's our Pentecost story to tell. . .and, like the disciples,
we just may be amazed at what happens as a result.
True, we might lose a neighbour as a friend. . .
or we may open a heart for the Spirit to enter
in the one listening to us—who will then tell their story
to someone they know who may then tell their story
to someone they know. . .and so on, and so on.

And the miracle of Pentecost happens again and again.

Let me try this another way: If you happen to be driving past any church building,
you will see a sign on it that identifies it as a church—
which is why we associate “church” with a building, a place.”

But the Greek word for church – *ecclesia* –
from which we get our English word *ecclesiastical*—
the Greek word doesn't refer a building at all.
Instead, the word *ecclesia* literally means “the called-out ones”.

In other words, in the Bible, the church doesn't refer to a building or an institution
but refers to the church as people—because the church is people.
As the phrase-maker put it: “The church is what you have
when the building burns down and the preacher leaves town.”

The “Church” is people--people like us. . .people who,
through the work of the Holy Spirit, are “called out” of the world
in order to be gathered in communities, where they . . .we. . .
are taught and enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

And then, like the disciples who were filled with and empowered
by the Spirit and left the place. . .the room. . .the building
to go out and tell others what they experienced--

in the same way, equipped by and with the Spirit,
we as “called out people” are sent back into the world—
the world “out there” where we live and work
and shop for groceries or exercise and go to book clubs or 12 Step groups.

And what are we sent out to be and to do?

Well, the answer is “to be ‘evangelists’—a word which,
despite its unpleasant connotation has the word “angel” in it’--
and “angel” just means “messenger”. . .
and the Greek word “evangel” which we translate as “gospel”
means “good news”—which means an “ev-angel-ist” (*evangelist*)
is a “messenger or teller or sharer of good news”.

And what is the good news we are called to share?

Well, just as in the Genesis creation story when God’s “breath” or Spirit
is “breathed into” the dirt, the soil, the earth, the “humus”
from which the first “human” was made into a living being—
literally, a “God-breathed human being” —

so, in the reading from John this morning, we see and learn
that “like” a ‘second creation’. . .like a ‘new creation’. . .
“like” the new creation of new human beings—
Jesus “breathes” on his disciples and says to them:
‘Receive the Holy Spirit--that is, the Holy Breath of God.
If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.’”

Here we are told that the gift of the Spirit. . .

and the gift of the forgiveness of sins. . .
that these two gifts are interconnected and interlocked—
that we cannot separate one from the other.

Thus, what we are sent out into the world to share with the world
is the announcement or message of the forgiveness of sins of the world,
of the whole world. . .of all in the world.

Now, notice please: We are not sent out. . .nor expected. . .

nor given permission, divine or otherwise. . .
to proclaim judgement or threaten condemnation. . .
not even to encourage moral improvement.

Instead, we are sent out with God’s permission and blessing
to forgive sins. . .to forgive others who have sinned against us.

Yes, it is true that the call to “repent” is part of our message of good news--
but, as we have heard numerous times before,
 “to repent” means to have one’s heart and mind
 and direction in life changed or turned around completely—
 but not by threats or fear of punishment but changed by grace—
 by the good news of God’s forgiveness. . .by the grace of God’s love. . .
love freely given to us which enables us to love others.

Therefore, according to Jesus, forgiveness is the work of the Holy Spirit—
and the work of those filled with, sent out,
and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. That’s us!

So, we don’t need to be afraid or uncertain or worried
about being thought of as loony or some sort of religious fanatics
when we share our story of God’s presence with us
and God’s promised forgiveness of us.

On the contrary: All we have to do. . .
or, better, all we **get** to do. . .is open our mouths
and tell what God has done and is doing in this heart. . .with this life. . .
to this world. . .at this time by forgiving all of us. . .all of us.

And honestly now, do you know anybody out there—
in your neighbourhood or among your acquaintances or friends—
do you know anybody who isn’t waiting to hear that:
That they have a chance to start over, to begin again?
Do you know anyone whose life wouldn’t be changed by hearing that?

Trudy just finished a book several weeks ago--
the title of which is **The Four Things that Matter Most**.
And, very briefly, these are the four things
the author says we need to learn to say:

“Please forgive me.”
“I forgive you.”
“I love you.”
“Thank you.”

Please forgive me. I forgive you. I love you. Thank you.

Now, sometimes those four little things are hard to say because. . .
well, because they make us feel or appear vulnerable, weak, wimpy. . .
open to rejection or ridicule. . .or to being used again and again.

But in reality, the truth is that there really are
no more important words **to** say that matter the most. . .
because they are the words that, inspired by and fired by the Spirit,
we are sent out to say. . .to others and to ourselves as well:

You are forgiven. I am forgiven. We are loved.
We are loved. All of us. **No exceptions. No exceptions at all.**

And all we can say in response to such grace, such mercy, such love
and such freedom—all we can say is “Thank you”.
“Thank you” and “Amen.”

Hymn of the Day #400 “God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind”

God of tempest, God of whirlwind, as on Pentecost descend!
Drive us out from sheltered comfort, past these walls your people send!
Sweep us into costly service, there with Christ to bear the cross,
there with Christ to bear the cross.

God of blazing, God of burning, all that blocks your purpose, purge!
Through your church, Christ’s living Body, let your flaming Spirit surge!
Where deceit conceals injustice, kindle us to speak your truth,
kindle us to speak your truth.

God of earthquake, God of thunder, shake us loose from lethargy!
Break the chains of sin asunder, for earth’s healing set us free!
Crumble walls that still divide us, make us one in Christ our Lord,
make us one in Christ our Lord.

God of passion, God unsleeping, stir in us love’s restlessness!
Where the people cry in anguish, may we share your heart’s distress.
Rouse us from content with evil; claim us for your kingdom’s work,
claim us for your kingdom’s work!

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new;
who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate the presence of God, to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Sharing of the Peace The shalom/salaam/peace of Christ be with us all.

You are invited to watch and participate in the second/next video of the table prayer

MEAL

The Eucharistic Prayer

God is with us. Therefore, let us pray in thanksgiving over the gifts of God.

Holy God, you alone are holy, you alone are God.

The universe declares your praise: beyond the stars; beneath the sea;
within each cell; with every breath. **We praise you, O God.**

Generations bless your faithfulness: through the water; by night and day;
across the wilderness; out of exile; into the future. **We bless you, O God.**

We give you thanks for your dear Son: at the heart of human life;
near to those who suffer; beside the sinner; among the poor; with us now.
We thank you, O God.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, (*The bread is raised*)
and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me. (*The bread is set down*)

Again, after supper, he took the cup, (*Raise the cup/s*),
gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me. (*The cup is set down*)

Remembering his love for us on the way, at the table,
and to the end, we proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We pray for the gift of your Spirit: in our gathering;
within this meal; among your people; throughout the world.
Blessing, praise, and thanks to you, holy God, through Christ Jesus,
by your Spirit, in your church, without end. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Fraction (Breaking of the bread)

The gifts of God for the beloved children of God. Thanks be to God.

Prayer before communing (*Repeat 3 times*)

Veni Sancte Spiritus. Veni Sancte Spiritus. Veni Sancte Spiritus.

Holy Spirit, come to us. Holy Spirit, come to us. Holy Spirit, come to us.

Sharing the Meal

Prior to each and all receiving the bread and wine, they will say

The body of Christ, the Bread of Life

(or Bread from Heaven; Bread for the World; Bread for the Journey)

The blood of Christ *(or, The life of Christ; The Cup of salvation)*

Prayer after Communion

O God, our life, our strength, our food, we give you thanks for sustaining us with the body and blood of your Son. By your Holy Spirit, enliven us to be his body in the world, that more and more we will give you praise and serve your earth and its many peoples, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant us to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing,
so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

May the God of all grace ✝ bless us now and forever. **Amen.**

Sending Song **#397** **“Loving Spirit”**

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit, you have chosen me to be—
you have drawn me to your wonder, you have set your sign on me.

Like a mother you enfold me, hold my life within your own,
feed me with your very body, form me of your flesh and bone.

Like a father you protect me, teach me the discerning eye,
hoist me up upon your shoulder, let me see the world from high.

Friend and lover, in your closeness I am known and held and blessed
in your promise is my comfort, in your presence I may rest.

Dismissal

Let us go in peace to share the good news that Christ is with us.

Thanks be to God.

Although we are not using this hymn in today's service, the text is powerful and specific to our situation and our needs. So I include it as something to use as a devotional aid any time in the week(s) ahead.

The following hymn was requested by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, Resident Bishop of the Boston Area of the United Methodist Church. It is inspired by a prayer he wrote for Pentecost, 2020. **Carolyn finished the hymn on Wednesday, May 27.**

Gracious God, We Will Not Gather

Gracious God, we will not gather, side by side, this Pentecost.
How we long to be together, crowded close, beneath the cross!
Still we join our hearts with others, trusting in your love and grace.
We are here— your sons and daughters— praising you in every place.

In our houses and apartments, in the rooms where people stay,
in the midst of this pandemic, God, we worship, sing and pray.
People from each land and nation, in each language that we use,
grieve the need for separation, yet, united, share Good News.

As we're distant from each other in the midst of so much fear,
may your churches all remember: By your Spirit, you are here!
Long ago, the wind came blowing; flames of love and boldness spread.
Soon the church went out proclaiming: "Christ is risen from the dead!"

Peter preached what Joel had promised: In the most uncertain times,
you give dreams and visions to us; you send great and wondrous signs!
By your Spirit, give us courage! May your Church unite to be
bearers of your Good News message to your world community.

Tune: The Sacred Harp, 1844; attributed to Benjamin Franklin White

Alternate tune: BEECHER ("Love Divine, All Loves Excelling")

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