

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho**

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Pentecost Sunday

May 31, 2020

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, and welcome once again to our online worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. Our traditional worship bulletin cover has language on it that comes from a United Church of Christ welcome; it begins: no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here. I think of that language often as I welcome you to these online services, and I smile because it's more true now than ever: whoever you are and wherever you are, members and friends I envision in houses scattered around our community, others whose place I know only a little about and still others whose face and place I can only imagine, old friends, family of friends, interested strangers, curious neighbors, people who for whatever reason have decided to stop by and spend this time with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be, welcome to the worship of this community of Christ's people. It is good to be together.

Today is one of my favorite days in the life of the church. It's Pentecost, the day we celebrate God's gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples as they huddled together after the resurrection. It was a gift given, not to individuals, but to the community; a gift that knit them together into one body, filled them with courage, vision and power, and sent them out to spread God's love and reflect Christ's light. Today is the day we sometimes refer to as the birthday of the Church, celebrating the Spirit's transformation of frightened and fumbling disciples into the bold, imaginative, unstoppable Body of Christ that soon was, and still is, alive and at work in the world on God's behalf.

I want to offer a word of thanks to Kasey Haig, who will make a guest appearance today. And as usual, I've attached a PDF of the words of this worship, so that you can feel able to join with me in the responsive and unison portions, as well as the singing. I like to think of us reading, praying and singing together.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Kindling Spirit, build well the fire in our hearts this day.

Fan us to flame that all will see the Christ-presence of love blazing in our midst.

Burn the witness on our tongues: Christ's Spirit lives among us.

Jesus Christ, our risen Savior, has set his church on fire with strength and boldness and power.

Kindling Spirit, build well the fire in our hearts this day.

SOLO *"Tallis Canon"*

Kasey Haig, Handbells

OPENING PRAYER

A spark. That is all we need on this day, Imaginative God, to light our quarantined aloneness so that we can burst into bonfires which signal to all those around us you are bringing life and grace to us, and to the whole world.

A word. Just one, little word on this day, Poet of Pentecost, so that we can be the voice of all those forgotten by the world, so that we can be the warmth to melt all the hearts frozen by greed, so that we

might speak in that still, small voice, and be the ones that live out your good news to everyone we meet.

A breeze. A soft, gentle breeze that stirs the curtains on this day, Shattering Spirit. A breeze that will stay quiet, and peaceful, and still until the day comes (and it will) for us to become that storm of hopes to clear the despair from all our neighborhoods and lands.

Give us yourself this day, God in Community, Holy in One. Equip and empower us to be your people in the world. Amen. (Thom M. Shuman, LectonaryLiturgies.blogspot.com)

SCRIPTURE READING

The Bible actually reports two significantly different stories about the first disciples receiving the Holy Spirit. The first is told by the Gospel of John and takes place on the night of Jesus' resurrection.

John 20:19-23

When 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." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

The second story is told in the Book of Acts. Since we believe the the writer of the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Book of Acts, this can be heard as a continuation of that Gospel. As we discussed last week, both at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts, as Jesus prepared to leave his disciples, he instructed them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for power from on high to come upon them. The story that we know as Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter, when Jews from all over the world had gathered to celebrate Pentecost, which for them was a harvest festival that took place 50 days after Passover. In this story, as with the one from John, the disciples were all together in one place.

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.’

SERMON

They were all together in one place. It’s almost mean to open with two stories that say that. We have dreams of what that will feel like when we get there. I know that some of you are beginning to get together in small groups, but all? And in one place? Sweet. Music to my ears. But in another sense, if we can get our heads away from the question of bodies and buildings, in a very real yet very uncomfortable sense, we are all in one place. A hard one. A hollow place. A place of vulnerability and grief. We are together in our uncertainty, our loss, our hopes and fears. When all of this began, I had a very strong sense that we truly are all in one place, bound together as one people, one humanity, one planet facing a common threat that knows no borders. And we were all working together; and maybe we still are, but I’m becoming increasingly aware of our differences more than what we have in common. Some of us are inconvenienced and frustrated by the pandemic and the costs and restrictions that have been placed on us, while others of us only have the food to eat that someone places in our trunks after we sit in line for half a day. Some of us really don’t want to know what our investment portfolios look like, and some of us have 66 cents left to our name. And yet, it’s still true, even in those differences, we’re all surrounded by a shared experience of uncertainty and the unknown and things beyond our control.

We’re not so different than the disciples. They’d walked away from everything to follow Jesus and then had stood in shocked horror as it crashed and burned. Three days after his death, the disciples were still together, still licking their wounds, still looking over their shoulders when they began to hear stories that he’d been resurrected, but that wasn’t exactly news they had a ready made ability to comprehend, so they kept the doors locked and sheltered in place. In a different version of the story, those same disciples had 40 days with their beloved teacher after his resurrection, days of reviewing what they’d been told and giving their new skills another rehearsal, but then he was up and gone, and they didn’t have a clue whether or when to step outside their houses, and if they did, they wouldn’t have known which way to turn. So all of them, every last one of them, in both stories, sat together behind locked doors and waited. Waited for what, it was hard to tell; for someone to point the way, tell them what to do, come up with a game plan? In the absence of anything better to do, they waited.

They were all together in the same uncomfortable place when Jesus appeared among them, breathed on them and said, “Peace be with you.” In a different version of the story, they were all in one place when the windows began to rattle and the foundation began to shake, tongues of fire flickered on their

shoulders and danced in the middle of the room. They all began to speak languages they'd never studied or learned, and Peter took to preaching. As Episcopal writer Debie Thomas describes, "The story Luke describes is a fantastical one, full of details that challenge the imagination... But at its heart, the Pentecost story is not about spectacle and drama. It's about the Holy Spirit showing up and transforming ordinary, imperfect, frightened people into the Body of Christ. It's about God disrupting and disorienting our humdrum ways of engaging the sacred, so that something new and holy can be born within and among us. It's about the Spirit carrying us out of suspicion, tribalism, and fear, into a radical new way of engaging God and our neighbor." (*Journey with Jesus*, posted 24 May 2020)

As the story unfolds in the book of Acts, we're told that each of them began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. Pentecost was a major festival when believers from all of the known world flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate. Remember all those long, awkward names that I pretended to know how to pronounce when I read the story: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Phrygia and Pamphylia? Those and more represent the nations people had traveled from and the vast variety of languages represented in the gathered crowd. They didn't have United Nations translator capacity, but it was no problem for the Spirit, who gave disciples the ability to speak so that each and every person there could understand what was being said. Not because they'd brushed up on Greek before they arrived, but because they heard their own blessed native language being spoken, and when they were far from home. It was music to their ears and welcome for their souls.

I know that a good number of us have traveled away from home to countries where other languages are spoken. We're fortunate, because the rest of the world caters to us and is pretty willing to speak English on our behalf. Not always, but pretty often. Still, it can be a challenge to work with language differences, to know how to place a meal order or to understand the money enough to know how to pay for a purchase. All bets are off if we're in a culture where they barter over prices. Have you ever had the experience in the midst of all that foreignness to have someone suddenly step in and speak in a way you can understand, who knows where you come from and can help you feel understood and welcomed, that sets you at ease and makes you feel less out of your element? Tension eases, the heart slows and breath becomes more natural. What a relief!

That is part of the gift the Spirit extended to all who were crowded together in Jerusalem on Pentecost. The gift of hearing and comprehending the great good news of Jesus that was still unfolding, but even more than that, the gift of being welcomed and embraced, heard and understood, and drawn into the circle. The gift of breaking down the dividing walls between language and nationality, tribe and race in order to draw people together and draw people in to the fellowship of faith, the beloved community that was just beginning to take shape.

Debie Thomas asks these questions: "Has there ever been a time when we've needed such brave, border-crossing acts more acutely than we do right now? As the world grows more and more tribal; as nations, cities, and even faith communities turn on each other out of suspicion and selfishness; as we're forced by the pandemic to physically separate from those around us, can it be that God desires to pour out the Holy Spirit on us, so that we might learn new and life-giving ways of being the Church, being the Body, being Love incarnate for a frightened and imperiled world? What languages do we need to speak right now that we've never spoken before? Where does the fire need to fall, to burn away all that hinders us from being bearers of Good News in this dark time?" (same)

Learning languages has never been my favorite thing, but I've thought a lot about her questions in the past few days. I feel deeply, desperately some of the time, the needs of this world as I watch us turning on each other more and more often. I see protests all over the country by people who don't want to wait

another day to bind up the wounds of the sick or offer shelter to the vulnerable. I weep as I watch the news and see that video of a police officer's knee pressing down on George Floyd's neck until all breath is forced out of his body. And then watch as the pent up fury of generations of neighbors and friends explodes into riots and the destruction of a city I came to love in my years in Minnesota. What languages can I learn and begin to speak in an attempt to offer some witness, some service to the world we live in and the work the Church is called to do? I am confident that there are ways and places that the Spirit could work wonders if we developed some competence in speaking French, German or Spanish; but as I think about it, those aren't the only kinds of languages there are to learn. The letter to the Galatians tells us that the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The first letter to the Corinthians tells us the gifts of the Spirit allow some to serve as apostles, some as prophets, some as teachers, healers, leaders, assistants. Any of those or all of those can be learned and practiced, developed and shared as gifts of the Spirit that allow us to serve and share, speak and listen, tend and heal.

I'm not sure what my language is, my gift or my fruit. And I wouldn't for a minute pretend to tell you what yours is. But what I know is this: that just as the Spirit arrived when the disciples were all together in one place, so the Spirit is coming for us today. Breathing on us and infusing us with the gift of peace. Putting words on our tongues, fire in our bellies and love in our hearts. The Spirit still comes to transform ordinary, imperfect, frightened people like us into the Body of Christ, so that something new and holy can be born within and among us, even here and now. May it be so. Amen.

SONG *"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"*

Breathe on me, Breath of God, Fill me with life anew,
That I may love the way you love, And do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, Until my heart is pure,
Until with you I will one will, To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, Stir in me one desire;
That every earthly part of me May glow with holy fire.

PRAYER REQUESTS

JoHanna and Arlo Branstetter are traveling to TX and then NC next week. She organized a memorial for her childhood friend that passed in February, so they are going to N.C. to celebrate her life, and stopping in TX on the way so her dad and sister can meet Arlo. Please pray for safe and smooth travel for them

For Christi's dad, John's procedure to drain cysts on his spine on Tuesday.

For loved ones that are battling cancer through out the world in the midst of the world health crisis

For all churches returning to worship in their buildings

With all the hatred and unrest we are having in the USA, a reminder of the song we learned when we were little: "Jesus loves the little children of the world. Red, yellow, black and white. They are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." All of us, no matter our age, are His children and will be forever!

Christi's cousin Gary is finally heading in for shoulder surgery on Tuesday....it was pushed off last time because of his blood thinners and clotting issues

For the Twin Cities and their innocent residents in this troubled time.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, come. On this Pentecost Sunday, come into our lives, into our midst and into our world. Come breathing peace, and whisper to each troubled soul, each wounded body, each broken heart, each raging spirit. Help us to breathe in your reassuring presence, your quiet strength, your unfailing love, your mysterious ability to make a way out of no way. By your mercy, help us to breathe out our fear and anxiety, our impatience and indifference, the belief that we're too small to make a difference and the hostility and hatred that allow us to build walls and turn away from others. Heal our brokenness, comfort our wounded, weary hearts, and show us what part we can play in tending and serving the people and creation you so dearly love.

Holy and loving God, we are a wounded, weary people. We lift before you those who are sick, facing procedures, battling cancer, scrambling to hold the pieces of their lives together, heading out on adventures and in need of your sheltering presence. We pray for our country and our world as we continue to confront the ravages of COVID-19. The numbers of cases and losses stagger us, but before we close our hearts to the enormity of it all, remind us that each number represents a person, a loved one, a child of your heart. Comfort us in our grief and deepen the compassion we offer one another. As individuals and companies, restaurants and faith communities wrestle with the unknowns of how to move ahead in the midst of a pandemic, give us wisdom in discerning when to stay home and keep the doors closed, when to open the door and welcome others in, how to stay safe and where the line is between fear and foolishness, and how we can most faithfully walk through these days with you, each other, and the most vulnerable among us.

We pray especially today for the people of the Twin Cities, for the family and friends of George Floyd who are asked to make sense of that which makes no sense; for the police force charged with the task of maintaining the peace while also being confronted by the brutal actions that unleashed so much violence; for the African American community there and across the country now expressing their rage after years of racism and profiling, inadequate access to health care and unfair employment and housing practices. Lead us, O God, through the minefields of this time. Give us ears to listen to one another's pain, voices to cry out for justice and truth, hearts and minds to imagine together a new and different tomorrow, and leaders who will call all to lay their weapons down in order to search together for the road ahead.

Our prayers are many, spoken and unspoken. Hear us as we pray, and as we join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

OFFERTORY

A handbell song offered in simple praise, flowers planted in the boxes outside the church, a card that brings greetings and a laugh, a word of challenge spoken in love, a phone call that says you are neither alone nor forgotten, a mask worn in public, groceries delivered, an apology offered, a donation of money dropped off at the church, fresh rhubarb left on a front porch, a teddy bear in the window, balloons at the door, a willingness to rethink a familiar assumption while considering new evidence, food donated to the food bank, a word of love, a whisper of peace. There is no end to the possibilities of the ways that we can offer what we have, share who we are and participate in the work of God here in this world. Thank you for your gifts. Thank you for doing what you can, in large and small ways, to build up the community of God's beloved people. Amen.

SONG *"Every Time I Feel the Spirit"*

Every time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart I will pray.

Yes, every time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart I will pray.

Upon the mountain, my God spoke, out of God's mouth came fire and smoke.
Looked all around me; it looked so fine; I asked my God if all were mine.

Oh, Jordan river, chilly and cold, it chills the body, not the soul.
There's only one train on this track; it runs to heaven, then right back.

BENEDICTION

So now we leave this space of worship

And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain, the path constantly changing, we know some things
that are as solid and sure as the ground beneath our feet, and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ's light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit this there, found in the space between all things, closer to us than our next
breath, binding us to each other, until we meet we again,

Go in peace.

(Rev. Nora Vedress, Calvary United Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada)