

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

June 5, 2022

Pentecost Sunday

PRELUDE “*Breathe on Me, Breath of God*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

Divine Teacher, whirl around us with your wisdom,

Divine Comforter, encircle us with the peace that comes only from you.

As the Holy Winds fill our lives with dreams, empower us to live God’s hope in this world.

As the Holy Fire fills our hearts with visions, empower us to create a world of justice and peace.

May the Divine Gales of this day move us to know the love of God.

(Rev. Michelle L. Torigian, United Church of Christ *Worship Ways*)

HYMN “*Let Every Christian Pray*”

Let every Christian pray, this day and every day, come Holy Spirit, come!

Was not the church we love commissioned from above? Come, Holy Spirit, come!

The Spirit brought to birth the church of Christ on earth to seek and save the lost:

God never has withdrawn, since that tremendous dawn, the gifts of Pentecost.

Only the Spirit’s power can fit us for this hour: come, Holy Spirit, come!

Unite, instruct, inspire and fill us with your fire: come, Holy Spirit, come!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (in unison)

O God, You who are always doing a new thing, we confess that we sometimes close windows against the fresh air of new ideas, against the noise of other people’s worries, against the winds of change. God of every place and time, we confess that we often draw the curtains against people who are different, against world news or community concerns. Forgive us our insulation in our locked homes, our shuttered churches, the security systems on our hearts. Open up our lives, and let your Spirit blow through. Amen.

(Terri, <http://revgalprayerpals.blogspot.ca/>)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God’s grace is sufficient for all. That which we regret is redeemed and we are given the courage to live new lives. Thanks be to God!

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

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 people 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, "Fellow Jews 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

I don't know about you, but I love Pentecost! It's one of my favorite days of the year. That doesn't mean I'm going to tell you a story about a high-drama event when I was swept off my feet or turned upside down, and miraculously had my life rearranged by some force of nature I can't describe. I've never spoken in tongues, and honestly don't expect or even hope to. And to be completely honest, I have little to no interest in being in a place that suddenly lights up with flames that can't be put out, is filled with hurricane force winds that blow up out of nowhere, has birds sweeping and swooshing around my head, and is filled to overflowing with the deafening roar of 120 people talking at once, each in a different language that they've never heard or even tried to get their tongues around before this instant. Nope, I'm not a big fan of drama or ecstatic utterances or being swept up and out of control, and I can't stand having things flying around my head, but I love Pentecost. Go figure.

I love the story of the day when God's Spirit showed up and took that bedraggled band of disappointments and incompetents and turned them into MVPs and Nobel prize winners. If it hadn't been for the Spirit, Peter might well have spent the rest of his life beating himself up with shame and guilt about how he cracked under pressure, and let Jesus down when it mattered most. And James and John could have gone home, picked up where they left off and explained it all away: "Sure, it was a wild and crazy three-year-ride, and that Jesus sure was a heck of a guy, but maybe we just needed to get something out of our system before we were ready to settle down and take on Dad's business." While most of the disciples would have nursed private memories and regrets, life probably could have gone

back to normal as they put the whole thing behind them. But once the Spirit swept through, there was no going back, and normal was a concept that evaporated before their very eyes. Pentecost transformed the fumbling, flailing fishermen into movers and shakers. It gathered up that scattered bunch of misfits and outcasts, knit them together into a living breathing organism called church, and sent them into the world to spread love and possibility, forgiveness and joy. On Pentecost, the cacophony of voices became a chorus of praise, babble became communication and community was created from potential adversaries. I figure if God has even an ounce of whatever that was left over in the warehouse, I want to get in line, because this world needs it. And needs it bad.

The good news is that the Spirit isn't all about drama, and doesn't always cause a spectacle when it appears. It can just as easily come as quiet strength or an unspoken sense of peace, a moment of reconciliation or the whisper of invitation, the inkling to try something we've never done before just to see what happens. God's Holy Spirit can sweep through and upend everything in its path and bring an end to life as we know it, but it can also be the air in our lungs that allows us to take one more breath; it can trigger the first green shoot that appears after a devastating fire or graft an orphan into a living, loving family.

I read the story of a group of eight friends who had gathered for an evening around a backyard picnic table to celebrate family and friendship. It was one of those great evenings that no one wants to see come to an end, so they lingered after the meal. Somewhere in the midst of that, Michael said that he was standing beside his wife when he saw an arm with the long barrel of a gun come between them – at which point, everything began to move in slow motion, and everything got very quiet.

The gun belonged to a man, medium in height, wearing designer sweats who was a stranger to all of them. He raised the gun toward Christina and then to Michael's wife before saying, give me your money. He kept repeating the same thing over and over, harsh and angry, while fear spread around the circle. Give me your money. Ironically, like a lot of us these days, not a single one of them had any cash on them. If they'd wanted to, they couldn't have given him what he was demanding, so they started grasping for some way to talk the man down. They tried guilt: what would your mother think of you? To which he snarled, I don't have a mother. Give. Me. Your. Money.

Michael was thinking about how badly this was going to end when he heard Christina make an offer: You know, we're celebrating. Why don't you have a glass of wine? And just like that, the look on the man's face changed. It was like a light switch. He took a sip of wine, and then said, That's a really good glass of wine. And then he reached for the cheese, and as he did so, he put the gun in his pocket. He drank his glass of wine. He ate more cheese, while everyone stood frozen in place, watching.

And then the intruder surprised them all by saying, I think I've come to the wrong place. Quickly they responded with things like, Oh, hey, this kind of thing happens. They sat there in that sparkling night for a moment and then the man shocked them again, asking Can I get a hug? Michael's wife was the first one to step forward and give him a hug, but then another person also offered one. Then he asked for a group hug, and everyone got up and formed a circle around the man. Beyond strange, when the hug was finished, the man said, I'm sorry and walked out the front gate with a glass of wine in his hands. Later that evening, after everything had calmed down, the friends found that wine glass neatly placed on the sidewalk by their alley. At which point, the person reporting the story wrote: "That group of friends experienced the new language of Pentecost, a language that broke down fear and violence. That led to apologies and connection. Pentecost has the power to transform our communities, the gift of the Holy Spirit which points us to the promise of the resurrection." (Kristy Farber, *Journal for Preachers, Pentecost 2019*, pages 5-6)

The Holy Spirit carries amazing gifts to us, straight from the heart of God. The only catch (there's always a catch, isn't there?) is that we need to be willing to participate, to respond, to cooperate. God

doesn't force us, and so we're left with the question of whether or how we will work with God's Holy Spirit, whether we will let ourselves be transformed, how we will make ourselves available to a power that defies comprehension, a possibility that ushers in the unprecedented. Once the Spirit sweeps through or stirs things up, there's no going back; the old normal evaporates, leaving us on the brink of a brand new day, the likes of which we've never seen before. Even as much as we long for that day to break into this broken and battered old world, that doesn't automatically mean we've got our hand raised, saying pick me, I'll go, how can I help? Pentecost asks that of us, asks us to step up and join in and get to work. Ready?

That's a challenge set before the church at least as much as it confronts individuals. We often talk of Pentecost as the birthday of the church, because of the ways in which the Spirit knit that disheveled assortment of followers together into one body, a body that was fueled by an unseen and unstoppable force, and then sent it out into the world to carry on the work Jesus had begun. Over time, we organized and domesticated that church into an institution and a religion, and lost much of the sense of being a movement propelled by an unpredictable and unruly power. These days, as churches all around us are closing their doors and we live with the uneasy awareness that our existence is not something we can take for granted, I hear Pentecost calling us back to our roots, to the image in which we were created, asking if we're ready to step out of the ruts of familiarity to participate in the new life the Spirit is doing around us.

For a very long time, starting back when we were still living and working in New England, Ben and I have been saying to each other that if the 50's ever come back, the church will be ready for them. We've got the worship space and classrooms, children's chairs and choir loft, sheet music and choir robes for all ages and sizes of singers. It would take a bunch of recruitment, but we could put together a Sunday school or a Vacation Bible School in the blink of an eye. The only problem is that the 50's are almost certainly not coming back. True, the Beatles and mini skirts have, but I think the Spirit is firmly located in the 21st century. Unfortunately, most of us don't know what that means; we're still trying to do what we know how to do, wondering where the people are. What we need to be doing is offering ourselves and our life together to the Spirit, saying, move us, breathe on us, inspire us, show us. Or as Lutheran pastor David Lose says, "Our congregations will not discover themselves until they give themselves away. No amount of time spent on developing a mission statement or devising new member campaigns can substitute for looking around one's neighborhood and asking, "Who needs us?" and "What can we do with our resources to bear God's love to this part of the world?" (David Lose, "Pentecost Paradox", *Working Preacher* 2011)

I will readily admit that I say these things every now and then, but I don't know a lot more about what we need to be doing than you do. There's a new way of being church that's still being born and most of us don't know exactly what it's going to be. I believe the Spirit is leading us there, if we're willing to listen and follow. And I wonder if my retirement will present you with an opportunity for more actively exploring where God's church is headed. What I do know is that the Spirit moves rather than standing still, and the Spirit moves forward, not back; I also believe deeply that God is not finished with you or Wallace yet. There's still more love to be shared, more witnessing to be done here, more possibility to be unearthed. It's just the details that have yet to become clear.

Pentecost tells us about an event that took place in Jerusalem 50 days after Jesus rose from the grave, when God's Holy Spirit burst on to the scene with special effects still unequaled by Hollywood, gathering together the sorry remnants of what appeared to be a failed experiment, wrapping them up as one, fueling them with a fire that simply cannot and will not be extinguished, and sent them out to spread the good news of love and possibility, forgiveness and joy. Pentecost also speaks to us of the ongoing gift of that Spirit, as available to us today as it was to the 120 believers in Jerusalem long ago. God's Spirit calls us away from life as we've known it and invites us into a journey of unprecedented

promise. Much as it did long ago, the Spirit offers to fill our lungs and our lives with its power, to help us build bridges of understanding and tear down walls of misunderstanding, to open doors of welcome and build the warming fire around which we can gather and ask, Who needs us? What can we do to bear God's love to this part of the world?

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

HYMN No. 247 *"Spirit of the Living God"*

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us.
Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on us.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Alice and Geoff, Nathan in his long road of recovery

Mark Boyd: Prayers for Olha, Ukrainian woman who worked at N-Sid-Sen two summers; she and her young daughter live in Lviv; brother Andriy fighting somewhere in Ukraine

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, your Spirit brooded over the waters at the dawn of creation and together you brought life into this great and glorious world: fishes that swim, birds that soar, trees that offer shade, plants that bear fruit, animals that run, jump, climb, burrow, and swing. And humans, whose bodies you bring to life through the breath of your Spirit, that we might dwell in your image, sing your praise, and make visible your presence in the midst of all creation. When the disciples were huddled together in fear, Jesus breathed on them the gift of that same Spirit, that they might be filled, not just with enough oxygen to fill their lungs but also with a peace that runs deep and still, that draws its strength from you, and trusts you to be present even when you appear to be absent. Again, as the faithful waited in Jerusalem, your Spirit rushed in with the sound of a mighty wind, the dancing of flickering flames, the flight of a dove and the gift of languages spoken across borders and through barricades. Again and again and again, through the ages and around the world, you have sent your Spirit to accompany and advocate for, strengthen and soothe, embolden and energize your people, and we bring you our thanks, praise and pleas.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come as the whisper of peace that releases tight muscles and ushers us into sleep. Come as the refreshing breeze that blows away the lingering aroma of last night's supper, yesterday's assumptions and thread bare routines. Blow into the relentless recurrence of mass shootings and the 103 days of Ukraine's war and escalating tensions around the world; come as hurricane force winds, disrupt and dislodge the suffering and lead us in protecting and preserving life. Come as the hand on our back that nudges us forward to open a door and offer a kindness, the spark in the eye that imagines new ways of loving and serving, energy enough to try again untangling the knot and fitting puzzle pieces together in a new way. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Give us peace, give us comfort, fill us with courage and stand us on our feet to love and serve, follow and witness to you. Stir about in our imaginations that we might dream your dreams of all that could be, and fill our mouths with the words and wisdom to speak your truth, share your love, and sing your praise.

We pray, Holy God, for all those in need of healing and hope, for strained relationships and broken spirits, for parents in search of formula and the resources to meet their family's needs, for those whose failing bodies, minds and circumstances make home an unsafe place, for those who grieve and those in search of a path for tomorrow. We pray for the leaders of our country and of every country. Give them wisdom and strength, courage and compassion, the willingness to listen, a readiness to lead.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken; and hear us as we join together in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (depts)

OFFERING

God calls upon us to love one another as God loves us. Even as God has abundantly blessed us with good things, let us bless others through gifts that show we care.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

O God, on this day of Pentecost, we celebrate your Spirit so freely given and so powerfully active within your church. As that Spirit moves in our midst, may it inspire us towards generosity and fire us with an energy to serve you well. We ask this in the name of Christ whose promise to be always with us the Spirit fulfills. Amen.
(Glen E. Rainsley, *Touch Holiness*)

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

This table does not belong to any denomination, church or community. It belongs to Jesus. It was at table that he met people, heard their stories and shared his. It was at table that he deepened his friendship with poor folk and prostitutes, the business class and puzzled bystanders. It was at table that he shared profound insights into who God is and what God wants. And it was at table, with bread and wine, that he initiated the sacrament we now celebrate.

So come to this table. Leave behind any baggage of arrogance or unworthiness. Do not think 'This is not for me.' Think rather of Jesus saying, 'I am for you,' and accept his invitation to be the friend he cherishes and longs to feed.

Communion Prayer

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to God Most High.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to praise you, for you are the One from whom we came and the One to whom we will return. You conceived the universe, wove the world together and hold all life in your hand. You watch us waking or sleeping, you keep every tear that we shed, you hear every prayer we make, you know both our best and our worst and you will not let us go.

So, with rain, wind and sunshine, with all that moves in time with its Maker, we praise you. With angels and archangels, with the saints from long ago, with our loved ones who are gathered round your heavenly table, we praise you. With the church throughout the world, Orthodox and Lutheran, Catholic and Reformed, with all who love Jesus and honor his name, we praise you, singing the hymn of your everlasting glory:

Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God Most High. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

Yes, blessed is he...

who was born among us incognito,

who grew up without privilege or status,

who walked the way to heaven through the back streets of this world,

who told the deepest truths in ordinary language,

who touched and healed, blessed and disturbed without fear or favor,

who showed inclusive love in all its unconditional glory;
who, for all this, was crucified, died and was buried,
who, for all this and for all of us, rose again;
who, though high in heaven, is present with us here and now.

Blessed is he in all his love and beauty.

God beyond holiness, as we do what Jesus once did, let your Spirit move among us to settle on this bread and this cup, that they may become for us the body and blood of Christ.

And let that same Spirit stir our souls so that as we share this sacrament, we may recognize our Lord and receive him that he may be in us and we in him forever. Amen.

Breaking the Bread and Pouring the Cup

Among friends, gathered around a table, Jesus took bread; and when he had blessed it, he broke it and said, "Take this and eat it. It is my body. It is given for you. Do this to remember me."

Then later, during the meal, he took a cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he said, "In this cup is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Take this, all of you, to remember me."

All you who hunger and thirst for a better life, for a deeper faith, for a better world, here is the bread of life: feed on it with gratitude; here is the cup of salvation: drink from it and believe. The gifts of God for the people of God. *(A Wee Worship Book, Fifth Incarnation, Wild Goose Resource Group)*

Sharing the Elements

Take and eat: the body of Christ broken for you.

Take and drink: the cup of salvation poured out for you.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

Eternal God, you have called your people from east and west and north and south to feast at the table of Jesus Christ. We thank you for Christ's presence and for the spiritual food of Christ's body and blood. By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep us faithful to your will. Go with us to the streets, to our homes, and to our places of labor and leisure that whether we are gathered or scattered, we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we rejoice to pray. Amen. *(New Century Hymnal)*

HYMN No. 76 "O for a Thousand Tongues"

O for a thousand tongues to sing My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace.

Jesus! The name that charms our fears, That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'Tis life and health and peace.

My gracious Master and my God, Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad, The honors of Thy name.

BENEDICTION

You are God's servants gifted with dreams and vision.
Upon you rests the grace of God like flames of fire.
Love and serve the Lord in the strength of the Spirit.
May the deep peace of Christ be with you,
the strong arms of God sustain you, and
the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in every way. Amen.

(Chalice Worship)