

PENTECOST SUNDAY 05062022 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Acts 2.1-21; Psalm 104.26-36; Romans 8.14-17; John 14.8-17

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."

Pentecost (from a Greek word for "fiftieth") is the fiftieth and last day of the Easter season. Next week is Trinity Sunday (and our Annual Meeting) and then nearly six months of "Ordinary or Green Time" begins, during which this year's walk through the Gospel of Luke will continue.

On a calendar the Christian Year appears divided almost in half: about six months of holy seasons (Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide), and about six months of Green Time. Like a pendulum swinging back and forth, or a pair of lungs breathing in and out, the church alternates between these two movements each year: high holidays and everyday life, the joys of celebration and the grunt work of growth.

Pentecost is the Christian reinterpretation of the ancient Jewish pilgrimage festival, the Festival of Weeks, or Shavuot (pronounced "sha-voOAT" (rhymes with "coat")), celebrated 50 days after Passover. For the ancient Israelites, this festival was an explicitly diverse and inclusive Harvest Festival; there are instructions in Deuteronomy and Leviticus to include visitors, foreigners, slaves, and everyone in the celebration.

For Christians, Pentecost celebrates the reception of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. Happy Birthday!

The community of disciples was gathered in Jerusalem because of the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot). Jesus had promised the arrival of the Holy Spirit not long after his departure — and sure enough, on the festival day itself, the Holy Spirit arrives. The scene is spectacular and chaotic: a violent, rushing sound like wind, and then "divided tongues, as of fire" — not a fire that destroys, but rather like the fire that Moses encountered at the burning bush, which was "blazing, yet it was not consumed"

The Spirit's immediate effect is that many are empowered "to speak in other languages," and at the same time, each person hears the testimony in his or her native language. Think of a meeting at the United Nations, in which each person hears (through a headset) the proceedings translated into their own language.

The result of all of this is a sense of togetherness and unity: diverse as they are, everyone understands and can communicate. Everyone was dazzled and taken aback, asking, "What does this mean?"

As if to answer this question, Peter stands and speaks. He cites the prophet Joel, adapting the ancient words to illuminate the present.

The final and decisive chapter of history has arrived, the dawn of God's joyous Jubilee that Jesus declared early in his ministry and now the "pouring out" of the Holy Spirit upon "all flesh".

Jesus both foreshadowed and brought in this new era, and the Spirit will now empower a community through whom the movement's message of healing, liberation, and joy will go out to the ends of the earth. The church is born!

The birthday of the church is a perfect time to reflect on what “the church” is in the first place. This passage paints a portrait of the church as a dynamic community of people following Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out God’s mission of healing, liberation, and joy for the sake of the world.

This community was strikingly diverse, inclusive, and egalitarian. The Jews Peter addressed were immigrants from all over the known world (“known” to Luke, that is!) who were living in Jerusalem; and the Jesus movement would soon open up to include Gentiles as well.

Luke describes the early church as a diverse, prophetic community of bridge-builders, visionaries, and dreamers. Is that how we see ourselves- the church in 2022, in this place? The church is not a building, nor is it a particular membership or group of people.

The church is a mission, God’s mission, the adventurous challenge of understanding and connecting with neighbours near and far; of listening and learning to speak each other’s languages, celebrating and serving with the Spirit’s winds in our sails.

The wind or breath of the Spirit brings new life — and new life means new growth, change, and ongoing development. The Spirit gathers and protects, but also opens and challenges, provoking and pushing us along. So, “Happy Birthday,” - and also, “Let’s go!” Pentecost brought a new beginning for the first followers of Jesus; may Pentecost also mark a new beginning for us.

Here is a reflection on the Spirit, by theologian William Loader.

Wind, wind,
you come from nothingness and go to nothingness,
and when you are still,
there is nothing we see, nothing we hear,
and you surround us in our not seeing and not knowing.

Wild, wild wind,
you whip the seas, whirling great water-spouts and
fountains,
crashing on the foamed edges of the shore,
sweeping the unsuspecting fisherman from the slippery
rocks,
terrifying force, uncontrollable,
beyond our power.

O wind, piercing wind,
driving the blizzard, the sleet, the rain,
trampling earth with wild tempests and tantrums
that uproot trees, unroof houses
and wreak devastation in your path.

Wind, wind, wondrous wind,
hovering at the birth of creation,
whisking secretly among the wonders of new life,
bearing the seed,
lifting high the heads of mighty trees,
swirling among the grasses, celebrating life.

Wind, wind, we know your ways,
we trace your web on the map of highs and lows,
today’s weather, tomorrow’s predictions,
depressions and sea breezes,
we harness your power,
our weathervanes point to you,

a cross shows where you have been
and we do not know.

O wind, O silent wind,
where do you go?
Do you go away and play,
in outback gorges or bare mountains of the desert,
stirring small clouds of red dust among the bushes,
kissing the rippled smile of the billabong,
running down the slopes, exulting at the rock face,
passing by the mountain with none to see
and none to know your trail.

Wind, gentle wind,
wind of our breathing, our life, our hope,
renewing, refreshing,
sighing in our stress,
moaning in our pain,
still in our dying.

O wind, wind,
you breathed upon the clay and there was life,
you danced down to the forehead of a Galilean
and there was hope,
you shook the foundations of community
and there was Pentecost.

Wind of nothingness and awe,
wind of knowing and unknowing,
wind of bearing and begetting,
wind of secrets and mystery,
O wise, wise wind,
whisper to us your grace.