



Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost, May 28, 2023

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

[Psalm 104:25-35, 37](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:3b-13](#)

[John 20:19-23](#)

Oh Holy Spirit!

As we are here together, stir our hearts, awaken our senses, kindle the flame, set us on fire,
and propel us out from this place.

Renew us. And renew the face of the earth. Amen. Amen.

Welcome, friends. Welcome to holy chaos! Welcome to the fire of God's energy and love.

It's not tidy. It's not "buttoned up."

It's the Holy Spirit. Flowing. Stirring. Moving. Urging and propelling.

Welcome to the birth of the Church.

*"We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning
We didn't start the fire
But when we are gone
It will still burn on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on."
(Billy Joel, Stormfront album, 1989)*

Many of you know the song by Billy Joel. It's more of a protest song of a generation saying, "Hey, we didn't make this mess, it was already here."

But I think this chorus from his song is perfect for us as the Church today, nearly 2000 years after that first Pentecost that was the birthday of the Church.

*We didn't start the fire
It was always burning, since the world's been turning*

We are part of something that has been part of God's movement in the world since the dawn of time – since the first spark of creation. We didn't make this thing we are a part of. We are in the flowing stream of the movement of the Holy Spirit that has been since the very beginning. We didn't start the fire. It ignited in the hearts of the disciples and came down upon them and carried them full force into the streets. It stirred in the hearts and minds of the people in the city. It began in holy chaos, and spread in holy disruption, and launched a new creation.

And it wasn't tidy. And it still isn't tidy. At its best, it isn't tidy, and isn't supposed to be. The fire and breath and song of the Holy Spirit flows where it will, touching each person and each community uniquely, calling forth life, propelling you and me and every living person and every living being into becoming that full Image of God in which each of us are uniquely created – and compelling us to let it all flow out from us into the world around us.

It isn't tidy. And it isn't uniform. The fire and breath and song of the Holy Spirit is multifaceted. It shows up in the gifts each of us receive individually. And it brings holy disruption as each of us is stretched and urged in ways we never expected, as new life surges through the habits and patterns of our day-to-day lives and our communities. As Paul told the early followers of Christ in the Greek city of Corinth, the gifts were showing themselves in their community in the forms of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment, various tongues, interpretation – “all activated by the one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

What is Christ breathing into you as he says to you, “Receive the Holy Spirit”? What is the Holy Spirit giving you and calling forth in you as she flows into you and through you?

Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, poor or rich, White or Black or Hispanic or Native American or Asian or Middle Eastern, regardless of your political leanings and attachments, regardless of any personal history... as we heard in many languages this morning, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

It must have felt and looked chaotic on that Day of Pentecost! The disciples feel themselves propelled out into the streets, into the city center. They feel themselves compelled by a fire burning within each of them to speak with people all around them on the streets and in the markets and in the parks. They find themselves able to reach out to others they do not know, from cultures they do not know, whose languages they do not know – and they are able to communicate! They are able to reach across the divides of speech and language – they are able to speak and be heard, to hear and understand, to translate the Great Story so that each person they encounter can hear it and know it for themselves.

And the people in the crowded streets during a harvest festival time, a festive holiday time, are thrown off kilter by what is happening. They are taken by surprise. Their patterns and expectations are disrupted by this band of Galileans – this groups that is moving from group to group and person to person, engaging everyone with passion and a fiery energy that grabs each person's attention. And they are stunned to understand what these fiery folks are saying – and they are even more stunned to sense that they themselves are understood and known, by these people and by Something that is stirring them to see themselves and filling them with a sense of being known for who they are in ways they have never experienced before.

How is this possible?

And yet, Here it is, Happening now.

Maybe this is what we need in this land, and across this world, and here in this place where we live, at this time. At this time when we are so divided and entrenched in ways of thinking that are almost like separate languages that seem either completely right and familiar or completely foreign and bizarre. Some folks may be looking for the “big fix” – that one thing that will bring the unity we crave. But maybe God’s gift for such a time as this is some of that same “holy chaos” of Pentecost – that flowing sense of the Holy Spirit that is not scripted, not contained, that moves from group to group and person to person, that speaks intimately and directly to each and every soul. Because, as we prayed together in the Psalm, “All of them look to you.”

What if a taste of God’s perfection came on that first day of Pentecost?

What if God’s perfection is not found in order but in disruption? The disruption of divided tongues of flame – the disturbance of the peace that fans out across and throughout a city as people hear something they have not heard before, speaking to them in their own language and time and place and circumstances – speaking to them RIGHT WHERE THEY ARE, JUST AS THEY ARE – stirring and awakening a hunger in them for something they know they have always yearned for?

Does this Pentecost story look like perfection? Does it look like the work of the Spirit of God who perfects all things?

What if it is??

So, the disciples were all in one place – from many different places, but together in this one place, in the city and empire that had put their beloved Jesus to death, but filled with that surprising joy and certainty of Jesus’ resurrection and new risen life.

And then – what came from heaven? A profound sense of calm, stillness, peace? NO! It was a STIRRING UP! It was the sound of the rush of a violent wind that filled the house. And it was divided tongues of fire – not perfectly united, at least not in our human imaginations. It was divided tongues coming upon each person, and the house was filled with divinely inspired chaos! Well, not entirely chaos – because everyone was together, unified in the message and hope of Jesus. But they began to speak, each different languages – divided tongues – able to communicate not just their own tongue and voice and experience, but to speak to another person’s experience and in their tongue.

The miracle of Pentecost is that God the Holy Spirit enters our confinements and order and stirs us up toward divine perfection. And that perfection does not look like order, like everyone rowing perfectly in sync in the same direction! It is the order of the Spirit of Life, that flows free and rushing from place to place, through all creation, among all people and times and places. And, for the rest of the book of Acts, it is a chase scene – the church and the apostles trying to keep up as they are tugged and pulled and lured by the Holy Spirit to find where there is stirring to life, and where there is stirring to be done.

Throughout the world, Christians celebrate this day with feasting and joy and with prayers for the power of the Holy Spirit to descend with might among us and through all the world.

- Orthodox – vigil of Pentecost the night before – lying prostrate together as prayers are sung for all creation – and that all people and beings, even those in Hell, might be delivered and reclaimed and saved, if God is willing
- Imagine this ancient prayer of St. Basil being prayed even today and in these recent years – in places of the Orthodox Church where there is terror and trauma – in the Ukraine – in Syria and the Middle East
- Not far from the prayers uttered by people here in the US who have marched for peace and for equal rights, even under the threat of oppression and violence

What an audacious prayer! What a prayer of power to dare to pray, for the breaking in of the Holy Spirit, among us, in us, and all around us and throughout the world today! Even in the midst of those who have declared themselves our enemies.

What is your big, audacious request of God today?

Let us pray together, with the power of anticipation – that God will indeed answer, that the Holy Spirit will come and set us and the world around us ablaze!

For what will you pray?

- Is your prayer for the release of those in your family who are captives of their own choices or who have been imprisoned by others?
- Is your prayer for your neighbors who wander in confusion and uncertainty?
- Is your prayer for a nation that has forgotten the ways of justice, and even more the ways of mercy, and most of all the ways of love?
- Is your prayer for the peoples of this land and other lands divided by their own limited ideas and perspectives about privilege and rights and responsibility and care?
- Is your prayer for God's Holy Spirit to come and visit each and every soul today with overpowering comfort, vigor, and stirring of conscience?
- Is your prayer that all come before the throne of God – bosses and workers, Republicans and Democrats, police and people of the hoods, ISIS and Palestine and Israel and Russia and the Ukraine and China and Taiwan and the US and Cuba – to be humbled, to accept God's righteous judgment and ever-far-reaching mercy, and to learn love and have love awakened?

Let us pray together – we are together here in one place – we are expectant – we can dare to be expectant – we can pray – and God wants us to ask!

*We didn't start the fire
But while we live on
It will still burn on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on.*

Come, Holy Spirit! Thank you that you are here now! Awaken us, light us on fire, and set this world ablaze!