

“The Spirit Poured Out”
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Pentecost Sunday
June 9, 2019
First Congregational Church of Haddam
Higganum Congregational Church

Acts 2:1-21

This morning’s reading is the story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the followers of the Risen and Ascended Lord. People were very nice to me and said “yes,” when I asked them to read the passage in different languages so we could imagine what it was like that day.

There is an insert in your bulletin where you can follow along; the passage is Acts 2:1-21, and is found in English in the pew Bible. Each set of verses will be read in another language and then in a English. With six languages represented, I am guessing we all will experience the challenge of trying to understand in a language we don’t know, and then the relief of hearing in our own language. Again, [Volunteers], thank you for helping us experience the scripture.

“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.'"

"God is still speaking." It's a tag line for the United Church of Christ, but it also could be the title for Peter's sermon that Pentecost Day, which starts in our reading and goes on through Chapter 2 Verse 39.

My sermon today will be quick, and to get through it I will need some help from volunteers.

Pentecost, so called by Greek-speaking Jews because the holiday is fifty days after Passover, and in Hebrew called "Shavuot," which means "weeks" or "sevens." Here's one for the graduates to try. It's a "week of weeks" after- 7, 7 times, which is how many days?

So [Bible recipients], in your new Bibles, can you please find the post it page and read for us Exodus 23:14 ***"Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me."***

Shavuot was the middle one of the three. The people, actually the "men" according to Exodus, but all the people according to Deuteronomy 16 where this festival also is commanded, were to come to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate. They would present offerings of their first fruits, the first harvest of- another seven- the produce of the land of Israel, wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates.

So, as our text says, there are devout Jews from every nation there in Jerusalem that day. And Jesus' followers were all together in one place. Guessing game: many were there? Let's have everyone look in a Bible. Find and read Acts 1:13-15, and then raise your hand when you know the answer.

Just men? But I saw a painting of Pentecost, and it was just these twelve guys. No? 120 men and women. Ok. Back to "God is still speaking."

The Spirit of God has been sent as Jesus promised, and it blows where and when it wills. The Spirit falls not just on the respectable and respected, but on women as well as men, on the young and the old, not just the productive-working-years folks, on the poorest of the poor, the captives and the oppressed, not just on property owners.

The Holy Spirit causes change, causes what looks like chaos, causes a reaction.

The Holy Spirit is attractive, because people hear God speaking in their own language, and they see a transformation of those on whom the Spirit rests, the very fire of God upon them.

The Holy Spirit is unifying, not eliminating differences between people, but bridging them and employing them in the work of the church.

Pentecost is the Church's birthday, because no church exists except it is characterized by five things: worship, proclamation, teaching, fellowship, and service, and each of these is powered by the Holy Spirit.

And God is still speaking, today.

Today, we worship God and celebrate those gifted by God with musical abilities, our choir and Music Director, giving thanks for their year of rehearsals and leadership.

Today, our proclamation is of the goodness of God as we express our gratitude for the success of our graduates and send them out and on into new campuses and workplaces, new fields of mission for their lives to exhibit God at work in them.

Today, we lift up Christian Education specifically, the intentional teaching of the faith that takes place in our Sunday School and youth ministries including Confirmation, giving God thanks for students and teachers.

And today we enjoy the fellowship of these two congregations, a fitting symbol of the challenges and joys of differences being bridged, and together, as every week, we recommit to and are given power for our lives of service.

We can do these things together because we are one body, the body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the life breath of that body.

I need three volunteers to actually come up. [Present pinwheels]

Can you say, "breath" and see if it makes the flame dance?

The Greek for Spirit is "pneuma," like in the word pneumatic, and it means air, breathe, blow like the wind.

The Hebrew word for Spirit is "ruach."

Great- you can keep those.

Everyone, please take a deep breath and as you let it out say breath, pneuma, ruach.

Some of us here have worshipped in churches that enjoy still the gift of languages that original Pentecost. Others of us here would say that particular expression of the Spirit's power was necessary only in the early days of the church.

But each and all of us need our breath, the Spirit giving us life for the work we are called to do. Let us sing our hymn, feeling the air move in and out of our lungs as we offer our praise and prayer in this assembly. Amen.