

Pentecost, May 23, 2021 (Jo 15:26-7, 16:4b-15; Acts 2:1-21; Ezek 37:1-14) SERMON

Let's travel back in time to the first century, to a day seven weeks after the death of Jesus on the cross. It's 50 days after the Passover—time for the festival of Pentecost! Everyone's going to Jerusalem, the holy city, bringing the first fruits of their harvest as an offering to God. All Jews who were able made that trip every year, as an act of faith and praise, and as a time to meet and greet those who lived in other places. Because it was such a big celebration, there were thousands of Jews there from other countries!

In the reading from Acts, we find the disciples still gathered together in one place. They're probably in the same upper room where their resurrected Lord came to them that first Easter evening—entering right through the locked door. In fact, that happened twice! In those meetings Jesus told them he was sending them out, just as his Father had sent *him* out. But here they are, still in the upper room.

Outside on the streets they hear the voices of thousands of foreign Jews on pilgrimage to the holy city. There are as many different languages as there are nations represented. It sounds like the Tower of Babel all over again.

And then, with a violent wind and something like tongues of fire, the Christian Church is born.

All of a sudden these simple Jewish disciples, who've been hiding in fear, are boldly proclaiming the good news of God in Jesus Christ. And they're doing it in languages as strange to them as the tongues of fire. Every visitor to Jerusalem, no matter where they're from, can understand what they're saying!

Imagine the scene: some of the visitors were there because it was a religious duty, something you had to do every few years to show you were a good Jew. Their hearts may not have been in it, but it was a good excuse for a trip to the great city of Jerusalem. But for most of the travelers, this was truly a pilgrimage of joy and thanksgiving. God had blessed them richly, and offering their first fruits was one way they could show their devotion to God.

These faithful Jews already knew what they believed, and they didn't need anyone telling them strange stories of a dead man come to life again. But there was something about this tale, told in their own tongues, that captivated them.

Even more captivating, more *convicting*, to the residents of Jerusalem, was the amazing transformation of the *disciples*. Seven weeks earlier these men and women had followed Jesus to Gethsemane, abandoned him when he was arrested, and then basically hidden out for 50 days.

Even after several meetings with Jesus in his new resurrection body, after meals and conversations with their resurrected Lord—even after all this, the disciples had failed to share the good news of the kingdom of God: that God’s love embraces *all people*.

Everything changed that Pentecost when the Holy Spirit swept through windows and doors, streets and squares, hearts and minds and voices. Timid seeds of faith became stout trees of courage. Hushed voices grew loud with fearless confidence. The Church conceived in silent longing was born in the changed lives of people like you and me.

What do you think? What would it take to free *you* from where you are, to transform you into a bold witness to the power and love of Jesus?

Imagine what it would be like to hear *for the first time* about Jesus Christ, who died, was raised by God, and will come again! If you didn’t know the people who were telling you the story, would you accept the incredible revelation?

If you *did* know the story-tellers, would you demand logical answers to your righteous questions? Would you respond to the coming of the Holy Spirit with doubt, or with delight? With bewilderment, or with belief? *Can you even imagine* not already knowing the story of the undying love of God in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord?

But here’s a more important question: *Knowing* the story—having known the story all our lives—**how can we not be on fire for God?** How can we bear to keep the good news to ourselves? How can we fail to reach out in love—*God’s* love—to all people everywhere with mercy, compassion, and efforts for peace?

The answer to that, I’m afraid, is the simple Lutheran sentence, *We’ve never done it that way*. For at least the last 50 years, mainline churches have been pretty complacent, not very motivated to tell others about Jesus because we assume everyone already knows about him.

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And that's the problem: most Americans know *about* Jesus—but many, many people don't *know* Jesus. We've lost sight of the fact that faith isn't *in*-formation. It's *trans*-formation.

And the difference has been forgotten by the mainline churches: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Reformed.

But Pentecost is the time to change that! Like the wind of the Lord blowing over the waters of chaos in creation, the violent, rushing wind of God empowered the birth of the Christian Church.

God speaks to us, the modern-day church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we, too, receive new life. New life to go out and tell the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the world. New life to tell the good news that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Here's your homework assignment: Do you know someone who doesn't know the Lord? Reach out to them in love. Not judgment, not criticism, but the love of God.

Reach out and tell them about the undying love of God—who died on a cross for the sins of the whole world. Tell them the good news of that undying love of God is theirs. All they have to do is call on the name of the Lord.

Say it after me: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.**

Again, louder. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.**

Again, louder. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Thanks be to God!**