

Rev. Sue Ellen Grudt  
5. 31, 2020 Pentecost

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator,  
from His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and from  
the Holy Spirit, our Counselor, our Advocate, our Paraclete--our dear best Friend—the Holy  
Spirit!

And, speaking of the Spirit—Toot, toot! Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday to us! Happy Birthday, to our church!

Happy Birthday to the world wide Christian church!

Yes, in case you haven't guessed, today is the birthday of the church;  
it's 1,987<sup>th</sup> birthday, approximately.

Yes, today, the church's birthday is the traditional festival we call Pentecost;  
this word in ancient Greek means "the 50<sup>th</sup> day" and Pentecost is always celebrated on the  
closest Sunday to the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter.

Why is that, you might ask.

Well, because on this day in history, in Jerusalem, 50 days after the very first Easter,  
when Jesus miraculously rose from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins,  
well, about a month and a half later—50 days, actually, Christ brought about another divine,  
world- changing phenomenon: the coming to the world of the gracious gift of God's  
promised, precious, powerful Holy Spirit, as recorded on this day, in the book of Acts,  
Chapter 2, which is our first reading today from St. Luke.

And, that event has traditionally marked the birth of the entire in-Jesus -believing-  
Christ-ian or Christian church.

A little background:

You remember, on the night of the Last Supper with His disciples, when Jesus told them He  
had to go away- they were so sad and shocked and confused;  
but, Jesus promised they would not be left alone- "*orphaned*"- to fend for themselves without  
Him:

Jesus assured His friends that night, and us, also, in John 14:26,

*"The Advocate, the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name,  
will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I have said to you."*

Jesus gave us His Spirit, then, to teach His friends and us and to remind us—actually  
that word "*remind*" is not merely a little penciled in prompting calendar note but it's best  
translated as a permanent seal or stamp like that done with a Sharpie in our memory.

Jesus, then, through the Holy Spirit is always with us; He's constantly, perpetually  
here: On our darkest, most deeply sorrowful days, He's there to comfort us. When we're  
joyful, His Spirit sings with us. When we get sick, He helps us rest.

And, when we need counsel and advice, the Holy Spirit, sent from God, shows us what to do in Christ's name. Friends, we just have to allow His Spirit to work in us-and to do that, we have to listen to Him... We have to trust Him... We have to follow the Holy Spirit.

Isn't that fantastic?

To have such a forever guide and friend in faith?

As Jesus indeed promised, through the Spirit, He gives us "everything", He gives us "all" that we need for our lives with Him.

And, it's all... because of Pentecost.

Now, this day of Pentecost was the first day of a new faith phase for the believers of Jesus: we all sure know about new Phases, don't we, as we forge our way through the Restore Illinois phases in this pandemic recovery process; we're moving thankfully yet cautiously this weekend, right, into Phase 3; hopefully, prayerfully we'll back together in worship soon.

Now, that first Pentecost day began the Organized Phase—the fellowship-the community-the grow -the- church phase in the life of the disciples.

It followed two months of their post-Resurrection phase, which began when Jesus had breathed His Spirit into His beloved disciples on Easter night, as St. John reveals in our gospel lesson today. They then all came together with Christ at various times and places, the Bible records. The presence of Jesus Himself solidified the faith of the disciples in their Risen Lord and prepared them for their future ministry in His name.

John describes, for example, how Jesus hosted a fish fry on the beach for him and his brother James, the sons of Zebedee, and the other disciples in Chapter 21 of his gospel; there Jesus publicly forgave Peter for denying Him 3 times on the night of His betrayal; Jesus then three times charged Peter with "feeding" Christ's sheep-with the head pastoring - leadership in His new faith community.

St. Paul recounts in 1 Corinthians 15 how he was told, by those who were there at that time, that Jesus appeared at least once to Christ's brother, the disciple James alone and to at least 500 other folks!

"Many other times" Jesus is recorded as appearing, the Bible says in Acts 1: 3, and speaking with and teaching his beloved friends after He had risen from the dead.

And, after all that, Jesus made good on His prior promise and assured the disciples He would send His Spirit soon. He gave them in the gospels of Matthew and Mark what we now call His Great Commission, to "go and make disciples of all nations." Finally, about 40 days after Easter, Jesus led them out to Mt. Olivet 2 miles from Jerusalem, and in a cloud, Scripture says, He ascended into Heaven to live with His Father God. "Jesus will return someday", the angels who suddenly appeared there on the mountain promised the disciples in Acts 1.

We don't know when that will be, could be tomorrow, could be today, as the old church camp song goes, but we must be ready when He comes back here.

I wonder...Do you think we will be, ready? Do you believe we're ready now for Jesus to return? What do you think Jesus would say, right now, about everything going on in the world if he returned today--this surge of violence, the fear, the anger? Something to think about...

Now, all these events I just mentioned with Jesus occurred just a short while before this Pentecost day; they are important to share to best understand the gift of the Spirit's tremendous significance as a long promised blessing and prophesy of God.

Like that of the prophet Joel, whom Peter quotes in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson today. 800 years before Christ's birth, Joel foretold of Pentecost today: "*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...*"

That's when the Spirit came on suddenly to the gathered disciples in which Luke describes this morning in Acts 2 as a "*violent wind*", bringing with it strange, mysterious "*tongues*" of fire which rested on each of them, perhaps on top of their heads, like this. Wow, I sure wish I'd been there that day!

And those tongues of fire, Scripture says, "*filled*" the disciples there in that house with God's Holy Spirit, we read here in verses 3 and 4--And yes, even the house itself, we're told, was filled with the Spirit--this wildly blowing, rushing, amazing wind--this breath of God; whoosh...

Friends, that's what the word "spirit" means here—it's the word "*pneuma*"—p-n-e-u-m-a and it means breath. It's where our word pneumonia comes from--which of course is a potentially fatal infection of our lungs.

We need our lungs working -to breathe- to live--that's why this current covid-19 is such a tricky and dangerous disease because it frequently does not show typical symptoms of pneumonia right away, but it behaves more subtly and scarily --sneaking into our bodies like a stealthy serpent and slowly and often unsuspectingly sucking the oxygen right of out us, similar to, doctors say, the strange condition of hypoxia, more common at very high altitudes, which starves the body of breath.

Our breath is our food for life. And, God's breath--God's Holy Spirit is our lifeline to our faith. The Spirit is our link to the Lord.

And, that cord--this special spiritual communication with God--can't be broken or severed. 'Cause Christ warns us clearly in Matthew 12:32--that to deny His Holy Spirit--is very bad--in fact, folks, Jesus reveals it is an unforgivable act to God...

Listen to Jesus' very words regarding this subject as He warns the gathered hateful, viperous Pharisees and the rest of the crowd. Christ proclaims, and I quote,

*“Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”*

So, Jesus lays it on the line there. Boom. Mic drop.

The Holy Spirit is essential for our salvation.

I can't even imagine what would our lives be like without the Holy Spirit, can you, coming into each of us not in a wind, but in the water and God's word of baptism.

Wow... What would we do without His Spirit...

Without God breathing in the world around us and in us?

How would we survive?

'Cause I suppose we would have no Scripture, right,-because God's Holy Spirit inspired its writers...

like Moses, who wrote the 1<sup>st</sup> five books of the Bible—*“In the beginning”*.. and forward... and Samuel and Elijah and King David, Joel, from today, Solomon, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John...Peter, Paul...

So.... how would we ever come to know God and Jesus without His Word-spoken through those scribes- without the Bible to hear and learn of Him?

And, without God's Spirit in the world, would we have any knowledge of sin-either?

Without any official Commandments-

Without God's Holy Law recorded –

Without any still small voice—you know—

that inner person you hear who lets you know what is right and wrong in God's eyes...

And, still allows you to make your own decisions...

Right or wrong...

how would we live without that?

And, without the Holy Spirit we would not be blessed with the *“fantastic fruits of the Spirit”* which St. Paul lists in Galatians, Chapter 5: those of *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control”* the characteristics of Christ Himself, which God sent to help us care for each other and strangers and even our worst enemies as Jesus commands...

Gone, too, would be those special spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit which Paul reveals today in our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson to the church at ancient Corinth in Greece; those given for the *“good”* of all people, he says, no matter what their culture or economic status-given to *“slave/free-Jew/Greek”* alike. In Galatians Paul breaks further societal barriers by shockingly adding *“male and female,”* which was a truly radical thought for women were considered property in those days, not people and certainly not equal to men.

It's wild, isn't it, how these words come from Paul the former Christian hater/killer previously called Saul, whom Christ's Holy Spirit specially selected and miraculously converted to the change the world and grow the church.

Today, on Pentecost, the church's birthday, that initial evangelism phase began as God sent His Spirit into first the 12 disciples – the Bible says they had added to their group a man named Matthias, who had been traveling with them and Jesus since the beginning; he replaced the traitor Judas Iscariot.

Then, Peter proclaimed from God this same day in Acts 2:38 that getting baptized, as Jesus was by John, would bring the Holy Spirit to all, descending into those asking that day and you and me and all of us as the divine dove had descended on Christ some 3 years before. At Peter's announcement, 3000 people believed in Jesus as Lord and were baptized that very day.

So, because of the coming of the Holy Spirit in baptism, then, Peter and the early church disciple leaders, including several influential women and converts were able to successfully spread the Gospel to all ends of the earth, birthing the church as they, too, preached, healed and taught and baptized, all in the name of Jesus.

Historians record how the apostle Thomas, for example, the former doubter, traveled all the way to India; the new disciple, Matthias, to Syria. Andrew went to modern day Russia, where, in the same way he first brought his brother Peter to Jesus, he is known as the very first person to bring the Good News of Christ to that far away region. Philip had a powerful ministry in North Africa and was martyred there for converting the wife of a highly ranked Roman administrator.

And, remember Zaccheus, -the little man in the tree who cheated people as a tax collector until he encountered Jesus? He was not an official original disciple, but a powerful convert, as he and his wife Veronica, both filled with the Spirit, are recorded ministering in central France where Zaccheus, renamed Amadour, founded a church which stands and operates to this day.

So, the results of the Holy Spirit's early efforts: at the end of the first century, and about only 70 years after Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, there were an astounding approximately 500,000—half a million known documented Christians.

And, this tremendous church growth occurred in an era of definite church oppression and various persecutions under the Holy Roman Empire, which continued until the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and formally legalized it in the year 312.

Well, fast forward 2000 years later: presently, there are an estimated 2.2 **billion** believers in Jesus around the world, making ours the largest world religion ever. And, it all started with the Holy Spirit of Jesus, God on earth, and his 12 best friends that day of Pentecost.

So, we can't ever say here at All Saints, because we are small, we can't grow.

We got the Spirit—we can spread the Good News.

Cause we're not doing it alone-we've got the power of God with us!

And, now more than ever before in our lifetimes, it seems the world needs to know who Jesus is.

Friends, I'm baffled and sad.

Because, how is it that with more than 2 billion people on this planet professing Christ as Lord, it is not a more peaceful place to live?

Why such hate? Why so much violence? Why the disregard for the lives of fellow human beings, over and over and over again?

That is not God's way.

The Bible shows over and over again how Jesus purposely reached out in love and care to strangers, to the outcasts, to foreigners and to enemies as well as many people of His own Jewish race.

He taught and healed and lived and died and rose again for all folks equally. As that famous Scripture, John 3:16, so perfectly reveals, "*God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son...*"

God didn't just love one group of us, but everything and everyone-every color and culture He made. As today's Psalm sings in verse 30, "*You send forth Your Spirit, and they (all) are created.*"

We are all human and we all are created by God for His goodness.

So, it makes sense, then if we -if the majority of the world has His Spirit in us, then we should be using this perfect and powerful gift to help us care and communicate with each other-with all people- as Christ did.

See how the Spirit miraculously moved today on the first Pentecost, as those simple backwoods north country Galilean fishermen could suddenly speak the Gospel in so many different and strange languages!

That happened! That's possible! Peace is possible, my friends.

Jesus Himself in our gospel lesson today two times brought His peace to His fearful friends who were locked up at home, afraid for their lives after His crucifixion.

God was dead and now He was alive!

*"Peace be with you,"* Jesus proclaimed, in love.

*"As the Father sent me, now I send you."*

We are being sent by God, my friends, to a world which desperately needs the love and care which Jesus brings.

So, "Fear Not!" as the angels always say. We have God's Spirit and we have His peace. And, so we will do miracles, all in the name of Jesus.

*"In those days, I will pour out my Spirit..."*

And, on this birthday of the Christian church, that's Good News.