

Weekend of Sunday, May 31, 2020
Day of Pentecost/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A
First Reading: Acts 2:1-21
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
Gospel Reading: John 20:19-23
Sermon Title: "Sent With the Spirit"

Theme

Pentecost derives its name from the Jewish festival celebrating the harvest and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai fifty days after Passover. Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the Holy Spirit as God's presence within and among us. In Acts the Spirit arrives in rushing wind and flame, bringing God's presence to all people. Paul reminds us that though we each have different capacities, we are unified in the Spirit that equips us with these gifts. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to forgive sin. We celebrate that we too are given the breath of the Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world.

Text

John 20:19-23

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Acts 2:1-21

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, [the apostles] were all together in one place.
²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled

with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴But 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. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷‘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.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”

Sermon

It was Sunday evening – THE Sunday evening. Jesus had been crucified and buried in the tomb last Friday evening. But earlier on this Sunday morning, according to John’s Gospel, Mary Magdalene and others went out to the tomb and found it empty. There was some wishful thinking among the Disciples but mostly confusion. They had gathered together to discuss it some more that evening when, as John described it, Jesus appeared in the room with them! Did I forget to mention that for fear of the Jews, they gathered in a secret location behind locked doors and windows? And yet Jesus appeared there out of thin air.

And what were his first words to them? “Peace be with you!” Well, I would hope so! John didn’t give us many details but apparently, Jesus proved his identity by showing them his wounded hands and side, and then they believed and rejoiced.

But this was no occasion to sit back and celebrate old times. No Jesus had a mission for his Disciples. He said,

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

The time for celebrating that first Easter was brief and that was because something *more important* was happening. There was good news to be shared and the significance of that good news was just too important to be camped on.

Ever since that last Thursday night, the night in which he was betrayed, the Disciples had been on edge, running scared, and they had a right to be. There was a mob outside the door and they already killed their Lord and leader. Better lie low and try to ride this storm out they thought.

But the risen Lord Jesus, the one who had acquired the power to find them and go through walls, had another agenda, and empowered by his authority over death, he told his Disciples that he was sending them out. In fact, his exact words were, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Did I mention that there was an angry mob outside looking for remnants of this Jesus cult? Well, at least they, in their paranoia thought there was and that had been enough to keep them out of sight. But Jesus said, “Go, the time has come for you to

go and spread the good news. Tell people that there is no reason to fear anymore because the God whom I revealed loves them and has power over all the forces that deny them the life God had intended them.”

Did I mention that there was probably an angry mob out there?

1. Well, Jesus, whose powers were still being revealed and demonstrated at that moment, probably sensed some fear and reluctance in his followers and so according to John, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

The reading from Acts is Luke’s interpretation of what happened next. Although I caution you not to get hung up on the timeline and details of the two events, what is clear is that empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples became apostles.

Disciples are students, understudies. But apostles are learned, they are experienced, they are ready to be sent out with a message. Whether they believed it or not Jesus thought his Disciples were ready to be dispatched. The job that they had been training for the last three years was now theirs.

And the mission field to which they had been sent ... was right outside the door. Luke doesn’t say so, but I imagine that violent wind coming into that room that was shut up tight and blowing the windows out and blowing the door right off its hinges. It might have been a frightening experience, but it might just have been the kind of experience they needed to go and do what Jesus told them to go and do. No need to stay where they were. The windows and doors were open. If anyone was looking for them, there they were for the finding and so they might as well just go and do.

And go they did. This Holy Spirit had given them the power to speak in the languages of all the Jews from all over the world who had come to the holy city of Jerusalem on pilgrimage for the festival of Pentecost. Each pilgrim heard the Gospel in their own language and many believed and were baptized, and the Christian church was born.

Today we celebrate the birth of the church. But like any birth date, it’s just a point in time, an excuse to party. But we also celebrate something even more important; the receiving of the Holy Spirit. God still freely gives the Holy Spirit to those who call his Son, Jesus, the Lord of their lives. And God gives it because just like the

apostles of old, the spreading of the Gospel is still the most important work of Christians. I dare say it's more important today than ever.

We live in an increasingly pluralistic and apathetic country. The religious experts agree on this, the largest mission field in the world is ... the United States. And so like the first Apostles, we need not look any farther than outside these doors and windows to find someone who, for one reason or another, has not heard the Gospel in a way that has reached them.

It is not good enough to adopt an evangelism strategy that says our doors are open, if they want to come in and be like us then they are welcome. Here at Zion, we have an expression, "You belong here. We belong together." But that doesn't mean, here at 3300 Canfield Road. It means here among the fellowship of Christians wherever we are gathered.

These texts for today indicate that to be faithful to our calling in reaching those in our mission field, we need to communicate in a language they can understand. Does your church do that? Do you do that?

We have been given this great gift, this Holy Spirit, but to truly use it we must go; go to where the Spirit leads us, and trust the Spirit to guide us in what we do to communicate the Gospel.

Now traditionally, today, the Day of Pentecost is also a great day to baptize, and we have a couple of babies in the congregation but as you know, we are not gathering for worship again till next week.

Traditionally, today, the Day of Pentecost is also a great day to confirm the faith of those who have gone through the Catechism with me and are ready to claim the faith in which they were baptized as their own, and we have some students who could do that but as you know, we are not gathering for worship again till next week.

Traditionally, today, the Day of Pentecost is also a great day to affirm the faith of those visitors who have been coming to Zion to worship and fellowship and serve, and we have some who would like to be received into our fellowship, but as you know, we are not gathering for worship again till next week.

Seems like I'm repeating myself. Seems like I'm giving us excuses to not be the church.

But you know, the opposite is true. Even though we, Zion Lutheran Church of Youngstown have not been gathering for worship at 3300 Canfield Rd, doesn't mean we, Zion Lutheran Church has been closed. You can't close a church unless you quit and we haven't quit, we've just suspended our corporate worship. But if you are watching this video now, then you are worshipping. And if you've sent in your tithes and offerings then you are part of the continuation of the ministry we continue to do.

Sunday School has been happening. Daily devotions and prayer have been happening. Feeding the poor has been happening. Assistance to those who seek it has been happening. Visitation of the sick and aged has been happening. Just not in the usual way of in-person visits – which we all agree would be better, but we're doing the best we can. And listen to me folks, every time you are Jesus for someone else, ministry is happening.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So you see, Zion has not closed. We the people of God who call Zion our spiritual home have still been doing ministry.

And next week, you are invited back, but as I said in the announcements I say again. Be careful. Be cautious. Only come back if you feel it is safe for you to do so. You are smart enough to make that decision for yourself.

But listen carefully, you should stay home if you have a compromised immune system or underlying health issues or are on the list of people our civil leaders recommend should stay home and not feel bad about it. We are going to continue to bring worship to you each week, right here on Zion's YouTube channel.

God revealed in Jesus Christ still loves you. He knows you love him too. I love you and the fellowship loves you. There will likely be a time when it is safer for you to come back. We'll see you then.

Prayer

Lord God, we give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit which gave birth to this fellowship we call the church. But we pray that that same Spirit reminds us that church doors and windows are not to keep us in but to show us the way out, the way out to the mission field. Inspire us all anew with the good news of the Gospel and the mission we all share. We pray this for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.