

PENTECOST SUNDAY

MAY 28, 2023



“Come Holy Spirit, Come”

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

ONE: The peace of God be with you today. Receive with joy the gift of the Holy Spirit.

MANY: We feel the winds of God blowing among us.

We sense the tongues of fire empowering us.

ONE: How amazing is the power God gives us.
How manifold are the works of our Creator.

MANY: The breath of God fills us with confidence.

The Spirit creates new life within and among us.

ONE: God calls us to be dreamers and prophets.
God gives us a vision for a world of peace.

MANY: May the glory of God endure forever.

We will sing praise to God as long as we live.

***PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Powerful God, whose ways are beyond our knowing, we long to grow spiritually. We are thirsty for the living water you have promised to those who seek. We are eager to catch the Spirit, to be set on fire with confidence and trust to use the gifts you have given. Let Pentecost happen again in this gathering of your people. Inspire us to witness to your love and prophesy in your name. Give us courage to speak of your deeds of power, and to take the risks of daring discipleship. Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:** We can say the words that come with Pentecost: spirit, wind, fire. We can claim an interest in knowing the God of all creation. But how much time have we devoted to this quest? How open are we to God’s unpredictable summons and direction?

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESION:**

O God, we are frightened by strange tongues and people out of control. We want to manage our own

lives and assure our own safety. We are afraid that you will ask more of us than we are willing to risk. We do not want others to consider us strange or fanatical. We are skeptical of dreams and visions. We cannot trust some people you ask us to love. We want to believe, but how can we know that you are more than our collective imagination, a hope we cling to in our despair? Help us, God. Amen. Silence

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** God comes unexpectedly to those willing to wait and listen and trust. The Spirit amazes and astonishes even those who wait expectantly. There is more to life than the things we can see – and more in the things we see than our eyes can discern. So, too, God is more than we can know or think. Even now, the Holy Spirit is resting on you and on this family of God’s people. Do not be afraid.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

INTRODUCTION TO THE READINGS: Pentecost concludes the Easter season because the resurrection of Christ has its promise fulfilled in the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church. The name of the day itself and the powerful image of the coming of the Holy Spirit, like the sound of rushing wind and the appearance of tongues

like fire, are given to us in the account of Acts 2:1-21, today’s last reading. The other readings provide rich and meaningful expressions of the giving of the Spirit of God: “rested on them” found in Numbers. “Send forth” found in Psalm 104 which we will read together; “varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” found in our reading from 1 Corinthians. “breathed on” and “rivers of living water” as found in the Gospel of John.

READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, “All who are thirsty should come to me! ³⁸ All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, *“Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.”*

³⁹ Jesus said this concerning the Spirit. Those who believed in him would soon receive the Spirit, but they hadn’t experienced the Spirit yet since Jesus hadn’t yet been glorified.

READING: I Corinthians 12:3b-13

The Words of the Apostle Paul

³ No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are different ministries and the same Lord; ⁶ and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. ⁷ A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. ⁸ A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another

according to the same Spirit,⁹ faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit,¹⁰ performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another.¹¹ All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person.

¹² Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many.¹³ We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink.

***PENTECOST LESSON: Acts 2:1-21**

2 When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

⁵ There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages.⁷ They were surprised and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of

them?”⁸ How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene; and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism),¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!”¹² They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other, “What does this mean?”¹³ Others jeered at them, saying, “They’re full of new wine!”

¹⁴ Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared, “Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this! Listen carefully to my words!¹⁵ These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning!”¹⁶ Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.²⁰ The sun will be changed into darkness, and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

***GOSPEL RESPONSE: NCH 283** first and last lines
**“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.**

GOSPEL MESSAGE:

“Emersion of ourselves in the Holy Spirit”

The celebration of Pentecost as a Christian feast day is linked directly with our lesson from Acts, in which Luke gives his account of the church’s beginning. The place is Jerusalem within the temple precincts, and the time is the day of Pentecost. This is only one of three references in the New Testament to the Jewish feast of Pentecost. It was one of the most important Jewish festivals, along with Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) and the Feast of Tabernacles or booths. It was also known as the Feast of Weeks because it was observed seven weeks after Passover. Accordingly, it came to be designated Pentecost (fiftieth) because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the sabbath on which Passover began.

In Christian practice, Pentecost occurred fifty days after Easter, although the entire season from Easter to Pentecost was observed as a time of festivity and joy. No fasts were observed during this period, and it was the practice to pray in a standing position to symbolize the resurrection of Christ. So now you know all about the origins of the celebration.

This story has many interesting parts. The parts that fascinate me the most, the Spirit allows the disciples to suddenly speak many languages in order to spread the words of Jesus to many more people.

It reminds me of lecturing or teaching something to a class. Many of you are retired teachers. When you know you have to teach a lesson, what’s the first thing you need to do? *Learn the lesson yourself.* You can’t teach something you know nothing about, although I know sometimes that happens, and when it does, most of the students see right through that person. Kids are smart. They can tell when a teacher is not prepared.

In preparation for this lesson, the next thing the teacher needs to do is think about who their audience or students will be; college students, high school students, first graders? Do the students hear and see well? Do they all speak the teacher’s language. Not only English but also the “slang” of the subject. Each profession has its own language; medical providers, hairdressers, factory workers, military personnel. The military is especially guilty of using initials or acronyms. They assume we civilians understand, but we don’t. Why? Because we don’t speak the tongues of the person speaking.

We also need to be aware of the age of the students listening to us. For example, are they young children or adults? So, you understand the difficulties the disciples faced as they are commissioned to go out into the world

to share who Jesus was. And how are we going to do that?

One thing Jesus did was teach with his actions. Whether the listeners knew what Jesus was saying, they SAW what Jesus was doing. As they say, actions speak louder than words. If we are seen doing the works of God with kindness and love, I believe the message is clear. Jesus didn't wear a sign or name tag saying, "I'm Jesus. I'm here to teach you what you are doing wrong." To have the people around Jesus "hear" him, he showed them love, he showed them compassion, he showed them patience.

How can we not understand the message of Jesus Christ? The more we are around him, the more we listen to him, the more we read about him, the more we imitate him, the more we pray and talk to him, the better we will hear and understand, even if we don't speak Aramaic Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God all glorious, there is nothing we can tell you that you do not know. There is nothing we can give you that you have not made possible. Though you have given us the freedom to do as we please, through your son, we have been guided into being better and more generous people. And we are grateful for bringing us this change of heart.

Tireless God, you satisfy the weary, and will replenish all who are faint. Revive us and your church by the

energizing of the Holy Spirit; when persecuted, we may endure; when reviled, we may forgive.

We pray for our country and its leadership. Raise up as our leaders persons who are after your own heart, not seekers after power, fame, or advantage for themselves, but such as are set to do your will, fearless and faithful for your honor.

Healing Spirit, inspire all caregivers who work with the poor, the sick, the addicted, the imprisoned. Bless chaplains in the armed forces and in hospitals and prisons. Send your people to befriend the lonely, to comfort the sorrowing, to cheer the depressed. Beyond all human agency do your own healing work in the hearts of all who look to you.

We pray for all those on our prayer list and all the people who suffer in silence and are unknown to us.

Helping Spirit and Comforter, support all who strive to leave their old ways to follow yours. Grant peace to all, as we pray together . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 292 Verse One

"Breathe on me, Breath of God,

fill me with life anew.

**That I may love the way you love
and do what you would do.”**

OFFERTORY INVITATION: Your gift is needed for the church to be complete. Your gift is expressed through your personal investment of time and talents, but also through the money you received for using your gifts day by day in your work. What we invest in the church’s work is an expression of our thanks to God for all the gifts we have received.

***UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

Thank you, God, for filling our lives with good things. The abundance of your gifts to us is beyond our counting. Bless all that we return to you for the work of ministry among us and beyond us. Let your Spirit enliven our caring and add effectiveness to all our doing. Make us one in Christ Jesus our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***HOLY COMMUNION:**

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

ONE: May the Spirit of Pentecost touch you this day.

MANY: And touch you, as well.

ONE: May the fresh breeze of love fill your hearts.

MANY: We open them to the Spirit who would overflow from our hearts.

ONE: May the words of Pentecost offer you new songs.

MANY: We will sing praise and thanksgiving to our God.

Wow! What you do, God of imagination and wonder! You breathe your Spirit into chaos, shattering the emptiness and shaping all that is beautiful; you speak your Word into silence, and rivers flow down mountainsides, creepy crawlies inhabit the grasslands, monarch butterflies dance with flowers, blue whales leap out of the oceans.

Like them, you would feed those created in your image with goodness and grace, but we run off with temptation, locking ourselves in death’s upper room. Because your glory is eternal, you continued to send women and men to tell your words of forgiveness and welcome, yet we continue to huddle in fear with sin and its disciples. So you sent Jesus to us, to breathe your peace upon us and to bring us back to you.

With those who continue to live in fear with those who share the Spirit with others, we will sing your praise forever and ever:

Holy, holy, holy are you, Shattering Spirit.

All creation will sing until it has no more breath.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who stands in our midst speaking peace. Hosanna in the highest!

Like your glory, may your holiness be eternal, God of wind and flames, and may your Child, Jesus, bless us with words of wonder and joy. Though we would close our hearts, he comes to open them with love; though we would shutter our souls, he comes to throw them wide open with laughter and love; though we would remain hidden away in death’s cold upper room,

he enters to take away its power over us, so that the bright flames of the resurrection might dance over our lives bringing us hope.

As we would open our hearts to the Spirit, as we would welcome the peace and power, we tell of that faith grounded in Pentecost's mystery:

**Drawing his last breath, Christ died for us;
With the sudden breath of the resurrection,
Christ was raised;
Christ will return, to breathe the Spirit into us forever.**

Here in this place, with people gathered in this space, may you pour the Spirit of Pentecost upon the simple gifts of the bread and the cup. With the brokenness of the bread, we pray hope might dance upon our souls so we will rush out like a mighty wind to bring healing to our shattered world.

Drinking from the cup of grace, we pray it flow through us to become a fountain of unending generosity to parched people thirsting for life.

And when that day comes when we no longer need to huddle under the covers of fear, you will gather us around the Table with our siblings of every time, of every place, of every language, breathing the Spirit upon us, telling us the Word of grace and hope, as we sing our thanks forever and ever. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power

of your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes, that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

*RESPONSIVE COMMISSION AND BLESINGS:

ONE: May God's glory endure forever. May God take pleasure in works done through us.

**MANY: We have found renewal in our time together.
Now God sends us forth to serve in Jesus' name.**

ONE: May the empowerment of Pentecost continue with us. May the Spirit lead and guide us every day.

**MANY: We have acknowledged our many gifts.
Now we seek to use them for the common good.**

ONE: We are one body with many members.

When we work together, much good is accomplished.

ALL: We commit ourselves as people of vision and action. The peace of God equips us to serve.

Amen. **Amen.**

PRAYER LIST: