

Acts 2:1-21

In simple terms the day of Pentecost has come to be known as the birthday of the church and if I was giving a children's message it would make sense to talk about birthdays. Who doesn't love a birthday party with cup cakes and party hats and balloons and streamers? It's a celebration!

However this year, and especially this week, we don't feel much like celebrating. We've been cooped up at home since mid-March because of Covid (COronaVirusDisease) and we wait... waiting for the latest guidelines that will direct our actions to keep ourselves and others safe. With over 100K deaths to Covid and domestic violence, and racism, and police brutality spiking this was a tough week. The unnecessary death of one more black citizen who couldn't breathe begging for his life has led to rioting in 27 major cities... In the aftermath of all that we don't feel like celebrating. This year we have permission to lament, and pray, Come, Holy Spirit, bring winds of change, we are ready! As I've been saying since the beginning of this pandemic, this is a time for us to reset, rethink, and continue to repent of the ways that systemic injustices harm us. These 50 days of Easter prepared us for a new normal.

Like the first disciples at Pentecost... we too are waiting... and maybe wondering if these are the last days! In this age of the Spirit let's keep sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

This reading from Acts is a word of hope for us today. The Day of Pentecost is a time when Old Testament and New Testament promises aligned with one another. Joel, the Old Testament prophet foretold of a day when God's Spirit would be poured out on ALL flesh and all who call on the name of the Lord shall be healed. The New Testament promise is the one Jesus made to his disciples when he told them to wait and be baptized with the Holy Spirit and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, not just the ethnic groups and visitors who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot) - the giving of the Spirit is for all people!

Both prophecies, both promises, kept and fulfilled. That's the foundation that we as believers stand on, the word of the Lord and God's steadfast love and following God's son Jesus Christ who came to show us the Way and teach us these things.

These past 50 days from Easter to Pentecost have been a time of trial for us as we deal with so much loss: death, jobs, the economy, the loss of human contact, and gathering together. We could use a good dose of the Holy Spirit about now.

We need the Holy Comforter to wrap us in God's love and assure us all will be well. That's what the Day of Pentecost is all about a spiritual infilling, topping up our spiritual

reservoirs. Don't know about you but I'm a quart low! Our spiritual resiliency can get worn down.

As we remember the day of Pentecost we are thankful that the visible church took shape back then: the People of the Way as they were known. Today we continue to be the visible church but we are shaped a little differently these days. No in-person meetings in the chapel but no less the church: the beloved community of God united in our diversity.

Today, allow the Holy Spirit to enter in and reshape us for the new normal as we look forward with faith not fear. This is a time to recharge and refuel. Where there were vital embers of our glowing first love in Christ, we may now have become despondent, discourage, even depressed, bored or complacent. Some may find it difficult to pray. We've become disoriented, so much is changing so quickly. This is a day for us to allow the Holy Spirit to fan a new flame of spiritual resiliency to help carry us through these troubling times.

Let us find new depths to the ways we can attend to the Spirit and grow closer to God in spiritual maturity. When our spiritual core is strong then the Spirit can flow through us to others and we can do great things together even in trying times - simply inviting people to pray who've never prayed before. They might just try it.

Amos Wilder¹ poet/theologian suggests that gathering in the Holy Spirit is like, "sitting in a chamber next to an atomic oven, there are invisible rays and you leave your watch outside."

This time last year, do you remember what we did? In a Spirit-led prayer time we spent 50 days after the 50 days of Pentecost in prayer. At that time we were praying for the revitalization of the community and the chapel and you prayed for each other! Were those prayers answered? I would say Alleluia! Amen. We started the Vital Congregations Initiative and Sunday after Sunday more people joined in!

Well guess what we are going to do for the next 50 days? PRAY! "The second annual 50 days of prayer initiative" A call to prayer! An even more intentional time of prayer with an even more specific prayer list So dust off those Prayer Journals or start one. Let's start right now...

¹ Amos Wilder, 'Electric Chimes and Ram's Horns,' *Christian Century* 88, no.4 (January 27, 1971):105