

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they 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.

⁵ Now 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.'

¹⁴ But 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Sermon – Pentecost – May 31, 2020 Good morning. I really enjoy sermon preparation. It gets me into textual biblical study, which includes seeing the scripture in its original setting, like the Pentecost reading for today. The text study gets my questions going, fueling my curiosity, like learning about the Jewish Festival of Weeks or Shavuot, also called Pentecost. At that time it was a harvest festival. In my mind I had the impression that Pentecost for Jewish people must have been like the Muslim Haj, like making a pilgrimage to Mecca. And some of the people from the close region did make it a pilgrimage. But the reading says this vast diversity of Jewish people from every country of their known world were living in Jerusalem, dwelling for some time, I'm thinking at least for some months. Hmm. So at least for some times of every year Jerusalem was a very diverse city ethnically, with so many languages. I hadn't thought of Jerusalem that way. That would have meant people that also had different facial features, probably different color, people from 3 continents. I am curious about what kinds of discrimination there were in Jerusalem with all these minority groups. I think you can already see some prejudice in this scripture when people hearing their own languages spoken by Jesus' disciples say; "Are not all these who are speaking Galilean? In other words, how could these uneducated hick people from the north speak other languages, and in particular speak our languages. To me it sounds like the prejudice you could find in Columbus about Appalachian people or rural people. The word Pentecost literally means 50 days; 50 days after the Passover. For Jesus' then followers, it also meant 50 days after his crucifixion and resurrection; and 10 days after his ascension. Jesus' then followers were faithful to Jesus' instruction to remain in Jerusalem, and to pray for and to wait for the Holy Spirit, the promised power from on high. Tradition has them waiting and praying in the same upper room where Jesus had been with them before his death – sharing a meal. And we have that amazing account read this morning – of what sounded like a mighty wind, and what seemed like tongues of fire resting on their heads, without their hair burning – and them dispersing into the festival crowds speaking some of the same languages of that diverse multitude – attracting a lot of attention, drawing people in to hear, to listen to the message about Jesus, and what had happened to him at Passover time, and what Jesus' life, death and resurrection mean for them, and the whole world. Luke, the writer of Acts, pulls in a prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures, from the prophet Joel, to make sense of very unusual happenings in diverse Jerusalem. Peter preaches that this is what God says will happen, that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on ALL people, sons AND daughters, old AND young, free people AND slaves. I think in the way Luke weaves this story that he is saying that the Holy Spirit blows through human divisions and does not discriminate, and often blows in and empowers unlikely people, even Galileans. The Spirit blows through any hierarchical thinking about who should be in and who should be out, who should be up or lower down. Slaves from Africa who took on the religion of the slaveowners of our country came quickly to see how liberating the Holy Spirit is, how equalizing. There is no white supremacy with the Holy Spirit. There is a new reality for the siblings of Jesus which we hold in these days. When I am putting a sermon together I prayerfully write down things about the present context. As I wrote yesterday, I read the reports of both peaceful and violent protest in Columbus, Minneapolis where Floyd George was killed, Detroit, Atlanta, New York City, many

places. On Facebook I looked at many responses to the protests. I'm saddened and disheartened by the violence. I can see that out-of-state violent agitators have infiltrated what were intended to be peaceful protests. I want to acknowledge pent-up tensions that are built up through many years of oppression that spill out in angry ways. What would the Holy Spirit be blowing in us to do and say in our present context? When we had discussions at our adult forum in Acton Hall about racism some years back, one of our African members shared from his personal story about being a black man in Columbus. We need more of this sharing, this listening, the Holy Spirit opening ears and hearts to the stories of others, to their challenges, so that we can better stand up for all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, through the redemption of Jesus, through the forgiveness of sins, we are one. This past week was National Reconciliation Week in Australia, part of a movement of saying sorry, of seeking wellness for aboriginal people. I personally disagree with the term reconciliation in this case, because that word means that at one time we were together, then relations broke down, and now there is work on building bridges. But the indigenous people were not one with the colonizers to start with. But from a biblical stance the word reconciliation can work; that God created all people equal and together, but humans messed this up in their dividing and conquering, and now with the power of the Holy Spirit we are working to be reconciled, working for justice for those who are pushed aside, pushed down. The Holy Spirit blows down barriers, and pulls us into working for that kind of reconciliation. That calling is there in our baptism. Later on in Acts 2 there is the record of the effects of the power of the Holy Spirit that first Pentecost day. Many came to see a new reality through Jesus. We hear; 'those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized, and that day 3000 persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.' Both men and women were baptized in this Jewish reform movement. That is radical, as before only the males were the inner worshipping body, and the women were auxiliary. Now at Pentecost and beyond, just as in Joel's prophecy quoted by Peter, the Spirit blows away any thinking of an inner group and an auxiliary, and makes a big partnership with God. Thinking of our present context, we were going to be having confirmation today, of three young women, Kailyn Knutson, Kara Loomis and Gloria Cooper. We were going to be having an in-person farewell and blessing to our Vicar of two years Kimberly Cooper. No cake and punch this year. No laying on of hands for prayer. The Spirit blows in and around us in a very different year. Who could believe that our church would have been closed for worship here for almost three months? When we came in for the rehearsal for today on Thursday evening, the chairs in the Assembly Room were still set up for the Lenten worship at noon on March 11th. We are a smaller group here. Many of our people are not able to be here today. Retirement homes are still in lock down. Some people have consulted their doctors and/or children and have been asked/ordered not to come in. Some people are just not ready to be in a larger group. And in and with the Holy Spirit, we are all one, together, working for Jesus, with the Father. May Jesus, his Father, and their Spirit bless you so richly, give you all you need for these unusual and challenging times, especially to be breaking down any barriers, and working together. Amen.

