

Worship at home

Mooretown Presbyterian Churches
May 28, 2023
(<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>, 519-813-9646)

Pentecost Sunday



*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

God calls us to worship

Call to worship: Psalm 104:24-31

We respond in praise and confession

Prayer of praise and supplication:

Holy Spirit,
you encourage us to face each new day.
You are as close to us as our breath, giving us life.
You refresh us like the breeze on a warm afternoon.
You challenge us like a strong wind, rousing our attention.
Open our eyes to the wonder of God's mystery.
Open our hearts to the warmth of Christ's mercy.
Guide us into all truth for to you, with the Father and the Son,
we offer our prayers and praise in love and loyalty.
Make us one in worship and witness by your grace and power. Amen.

*Hymn #277 "On this assembled host"

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**Holy Spirit,
you inspired Jesus' followers
to dare great things in his name.
But we confess that too often
we ignore the flame
of your presence among us.
Forgive us for the sins
we have committed by our actions
and the sins
we have committed by failing to act.
Blow on the embers of our faith
and reignite us for mission and ministry. Amen.**

God speaks to us

We hear the gospel of God's grace:

*(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is,
"His love endures forever")*

*Hymn: #506 "The Spirit breathes upon the word"

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:1, 9-12

John 16:7-15

Acts 2:1-20

(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, "Thanks be to God")

Sermon:

Holy Spirit, the Law, and us

Today is Pentecost Sunday.

On this day nearly 2,000 years ago, the Holy Spirit filled the hearts and minds of the assembled host of Christ's disciples where they had gathered in Jerusalem.

Under His guidance, they began talking about God's deeds of power in various languages which they had not previously learned. And the Christian movement began in earnest. A movement that would grow and develop into a community and then what might be considered a nation covering the surface of the globe (the "ends of the earth.")

I have long been interested in why it might be that God chose the day of *Pentecost* to orchestrate this event.

The reason I'm often given, is that because Pentecost is one of the Jewish pilgrimage festivals, the city of Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims who could then take their testimonies back to their home countries and so begin the spread of the gospel of Jesus to all nations.

Maybe.

That is, undoubtedly, a happy consequence of the events.

However, it doesn't satisfy my curiosity.

There were other pilgrimage festivals during which Jerusalem was filled with people from all nations. And, there are probably other ways in which God could have catalysed the spread of his gospel and the beginning of His church.

So, why did the Holy Spirit come upon the disciples in this dramatic way that kick-started the church *on the day of Pentecost*?

It's helpful to try and understand some of what the Day of Pentecost was all about before the church developed and claimed the day for our own special celebrations. Like many aspects of Christianity, Pentecost is a Jewish festival. We who are not Jews by ancestry, are adopted into the family of God by the Father's grace, and are adopted into the various applicable traditions that take on new meaning in Christ, but the festival itself has its roots in Judaism and even before, during the Exile.

So, Why did Pilgrims flock to Jerusalem? What were they celebrating?

The books commonly called the TORAH, or, the Teachings, or, the Law, or, the first 5 books of our Old Testament describe three major festivals which marked the Jewish year and which involved pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

Now, the names of these festivals, together with their exact dating and methods of celebration developed as the nation of Israel itself developed. However, what remains constant is that through these three festivals, the Israelites regularly re-told the story of God's redemptive grace. Of God's deeds of saving power.

They provided liturgical gate posts for God's Holy Nation.

(The last of the three was the *Festival of Booths* which remembers the Israelites time in the wilderness when they lived for two generations as homeless nomads, trusting God entirely for their daily provisions (a booth is a temporary shelter.))

The first of these was the *Passover festival*.

The Passover Festival marked the first month of the year: Abid. The nation would start the year by remembering when God had delivered their ancestors from the tyranny of their Egyptian overlords and set them free to worship Yahweh alone. The festival remembers that when God condemned and destroyed evil, His children (Israel) were *passed over* so they could live again. The year would begin by remembering that God has the ability to free His people from everything that detracts from the Holy Life He has designed.

Then would come the *Feast of Weeks*.

Originally a harvest thanksgiving festival. As the community settled in the Promised Land and reflected on God's mighty deeds of power in their own experiences and those of their ancestors, they reflected on their time in the wilderness following the first Passover.

After God had set his people free from slavery in Egypt, he led them to Mt. Sinai where, through Moses, he handed on to them the Law: the terms of the covenant. These teachings were intended to help His newly liberated people think, live, worship, and behave in ways that would truthfully reveal to other nations who God is. By living according to the Law, the people of Israel would be a nation holy to the Lord and others would see their example, hear their teaching, and come to know the Lord God for themselves.

In time, they began to celebrate the gift of the Law during the Festival of Weeks.

They begin the year remembering how God gives freedom from the tyranny of evil. Then, on the day after a *week of weeks* (seven weeks + a day = 50 days), they celebrate the gift of the Law by which God would teach them how to be His holy people and thus His witnesses to the other nations.

The time between the two festivals matters because in the biblical imagination, a week (7 days) is symbolic of completion. Perfection. In 6 days, God created the world, and on the 7th day He saw it was complete. Perfect.

A week of weeks is perfection squared.

Freedom given on day 1. Law given after a week of weeks.

Passover. Then the festival of weeks, later called *Pentecost*. (50 days)

With these two events: Freedom and Law/Passover and Pentecost, bookending a period of perfection, we have the completed story of God's redemptive grace in this age.

God sets us free from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil, and he teaches us to be his holy people and his witnesses for other nations.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Today is the 50th day after the Passover sabbath.

On the day of Passover, while Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims preparing the meal by which they remember God's deeds of deliverance and redemption; His gift of freedom and reconciliation, Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God, was crucified on a hill called Mt. Calvary.

By his sacrifice, sin is forgiven, the power of death is defeated, and Satan is overthrown.

Then, a week of weeks later, while again Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims celebrating now the gift of the Law (another name for which is Teaching which are recorded in the Sacred Scripture), the Holy Spirit took over the hearts and minds of the disciples, guided them to the truth, and gave them the ability to tell others about Jesus.

Deliverance and Law are the gate posts of the Holy Community.

God has set us free from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil and has given to us in the Scriptures the teachings by which we can now live as His Holy Community in the present age; a people that bear witness to His kingdom.

This, I think, is why the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit still uses the words of the Law; the words of Scripture to teach us and shape us into His Holy Community in the present age that bears witness to God's kingdom come and coming on earth as it is in heaven.

Part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to help us read, understand, and obey God's Word for God's glory. Through the Law, the Spirit teaches us what Jesus needs us to know so that, through us, he can continue his ministry.

Which means, as members of this holy nation, and individually as representatives of Christ (who the Spirit glorifies by guiding us into His truth), we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit's illumination as we attend to the Scriptures and allow Him to connect the dots in our minds through God's Word.

The Holy Spirit will never contradict the Word of God.

If you get an idea, and you wonder if it's from the Holy Spirit, you test it against the scriptures. If it makes sense with the revelation of Scripture, then it's probably in-line with God's will.

Similarly, when we read the Scriptures, we don't read them as one might read any other book. To do so is simply to read lifeless words printed on dead trees.

The Law, is the word of the Living God to His people whom He loves and rescues from evil.

So, when we read the Scriptures, we ought to do so depending on the illumination of the Holy Spirit who will guide our eyes, our thoughts, our emotions into all truth.

You've probably noticed that often in public services of worship, a short prayer is offered before the Bible is read. In the Reformed tradition, this is called the Prayer for Illumination – *not* a prayer of invocation. By it we are asking the Holy Spirit – who is already with His church and dwelling in the hearts and minds of those who believe – to help us read, understand, and obey God's Word. Thus, we can, by the

Spirit's help, properly hear the Word of the Lord so that we can faithfully and courageously bear witness to Jesus and his kingdom.

As Christians, we live in the power of the Holy Spirit. We entrust to Him our thoughts, our emotions, and our actions.

Which means, that to be faithful, we live by the Word of God. By the Scriptures. By the Law. Trusting the Holy Spirit to illuminate for us the things Jesus needs us to learn and do so that, by our actions in his name the Father is glorified, we are healed, and the nations are redeemed.

Amen.

**We respond by affirming our faith,
offering our tithes, and prayer**

*The Apostles' Creed

*Offering:

(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

*Prayer of dedication

Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, the Lord's Prayer:

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us on this day of Pentecost and renew our faith.

Re-awaken our love for God.

Let your flames warm our hearts with trust in Jesus Christ
and dare us to do great things in his name.

Spirit of Power and Promise,

Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us energy to serve you in Christ's Church.

Open our eyes to recognize needs for ministry and mission,
and to equip us to meet new challenges in ways we haven't dared before.

Open our hearts to lives caught up in stressful situations.

Open our hands to share in the tasks that need doing,
and open our lips in prayer and praise.

Spirit of Power and Promise,

Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and give us understanding
for those whose lives seem so different from ours;

for those with whom we've disagreed;

and for the challenges facing our community and your creation
in these complex times.

Spirit of Power and Promise,

Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, blow through us and bring healing

for all who face pain or illness, discouragement or disappointment,

for all who know sorrow, sadness or grief,

and for those who face pressures coping with the cost of living.

Bring healing to the earth, to places of upheaval and to ecosystems at risk.

L: Spirit of Power and Promise,

A: Blow through us and renew our faith.

Wind of the Spirit, Blow through us and bring us the compassion we see in
Christ Jesus.

Blow through us and refresh us as your faithful followers,
equipped to serve the world you love in his name,
as together we say the words he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

*Hymn: #284 "Revive your work, O Lord"

**God sends us to serve and witness
with God's blessing**

Benediction

Congregational Amen