

SERMON PENTECOST SUNDAY MAY 24TH 2026

“Different yet the Same” based on Acts 2:1-21

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The scripture reading today is pretty long. Usually some preacher stops the reading on v.11. But today, I would like us read and hear the whole story as written by Luke about the story of Pentecost. And thanks for Wilma, Laurie, and Rita for reading the passage for us this morning.

If you've heard of 'Pentecost,' you probably learned that it was the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire. Or, some people also perceive it as the day when the church was first built.

Pentecost, friends in Christ, marks the end and the goal of the Easter season, or what is also called the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery—beginning with the Passion, the Death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of Jesus—finds its fulfillment in the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Easter does not end with an empty tomb. It does not even end with the risen Christ appearing to His followers. The resurrection story reaches its fullness when the Spirit of God comes upon ordinary people and transforms them into the living body of Christ for the world.

Our knowledge of Pentecost comes from the Book of Acts, Luke's continuation of his Gospel. Luke describes the moment this way:

“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them” (Acts 2:2-3).

This is not simply a dramatic scene meant to impress us. The wind and the fire are signs of God's presence. Throughout Scripture, God often reveals Himself through visible signs that point to His power and activity.

The “strong driving wind” that filled the entire house symbolizes the ongoing, life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. Here we can see that like the wind, the Spirit is unseen yet powerful, moving

where The Spirit wills and producing visible effects in the lives of believers. Though through physics and advance education we understand the natural causes of wind today, its mystery and uncontrollable nature remain, reflecting the Holy Spirit's divine origin and unstoppable work in the world. The Spirit, friends in Christ, comes from God's hidden presence, unseen but active, bringing about a new creation in the Church and in every soul He touches.

Then the story continues as "tongues as of fire" appeared and rest in each one of the followers of Jesus in that house. "Tongues of fire" here signify the Spirit's purifying and transforming action, burning away sin and igniting hearts with zeal for God's mission. And fire has been used couple times in the Hebrew Bible as the symbolization of the presence of God.

Think about Moses at the burning bush, one moment that very close with our Presbyterian tradition. Moses saw a bush that burned with fire but was not consumed. Through that holy fire, God called Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt. Or think about the pillar of fire and cloud that guided Israel through the wilderness. In the darkness of night on the desert, the pillar of fire becomes the very important part of their journey towards the Promise Land as God presence among them and showing them that God cares.

Fire and wind are not random images in the Bible. They are signs that God is near, moving, speaking, and transforming. And now, in Acts 2, the same God comes once again through wind and fire—not upon a mountain, not upon a temple, not upon a burning bush—but upon people.

Upon the disciples. The ordinary people that follow Jesus as faithful as they could. And that changed everything. Because before Pentecost, the disciples were not bold heroes. They were afraid. Confused. Uncertain. Even after witnessing the resurrection, they still struggled to understand what God was doing. After Jesus' ascension, they gathered behind closed doors. They prayed, yes—but they also waited in uncertainty.

As I mentioned in the reflection last week, they did not have political power. They did not have wealth. They did not have influence. They did not even fully understand what would happen next.

But then the Spirit came. And through the Spirit these fearful disciples became courageous witnesses. It still the same disciples yet they are now different. Peter, the same Peter who denied

Jesus three times, now stands before the crowd and proclaims the gospel boldly. The disciples who once hid in fear now speak openly in the streets. Those who were divided by language and culture suddenly hear and understand one another. That was amazing, but the miracle of Pentecost is not only that people spoke in different tongues or languages. I think the greater miracle is that people were transformed.

And that is the heart of Pentecost for us today: We need to be willing to be transformed by the Spirit of God.

Friends in Christ, The Spirit did not come simply to comfort the disciples. Yes, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says that He will send another comforter. But, the same Spirit is also came to transform them for the mission they need to do. Sometimes, we want the Holy Spirit to make us feel peaceful, inspired, or spiritually uplifted—and certainly the Spirit does bring comfort and peace. But I want to remind us today that the Spirit of God also disrupts us. The Spirit pushes us beyond fear. The Spirit calls us into mission. The Spirit transforms who we are so that we can become who God calls us to be.

The disciples could not remain the same after Pentecost. And neither can we.

The challenge is that transformation is not always easy. We often resist it because we prefer familiarity and control. We like routines. We like certainty. We like knowing where we are going and what comes next. Yet the Spirit of God rarely works only within our comfort zones. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not calm, predictable, or comfortable. It was loud enough to sound like a rushing wind. It disrupted the ordinary lives of the disciples and changed them forever.

Imagine if something like Pentecost happened here in our sanctuary today. Suddenly there is the sound of a mighty wind filling this place and strong enough to open wide our windows and doors. Or imagine flames appearing above our heads without consuming anything. Most of us would probably be frightened or confused. We would search for explanations. We might wonder whether something had gone terribly wrong. Some might even want to leave this building immediately, out of fear.

Or imagine if, in the middle of this sermon, I suddenly began preaching in a language none of you recognized, yet somehow someone among us understood every word perfectly. We would likely react just as the crowd did in Acts 2—some amazed, some confused, and some skeptical. Scripture tells us that some accused the disciples of being drunk because what they witnessed seemed impossible and unsettling.

And perhaps that is the point. The Holy Spirit often moves in ways that disrupt our expectations.

The Spirit shakes us awake from spiritual complacency and pushes us beyond what feels safe and familiar. Pentecost reminds us that God's transforming work is not always comfortable, but it is always life-giving. The disciples could have stayed behind locked doors, holding onto fear and uncertainty. Instead, through the power of the Spirit, they stepped into a new life and a new calling.

The same is true for us. Sometimes the Spirit calls us to serve when we would rather remain comfortable. Sometimes the Spirit calls us to forgive when we would rather hold onto resentment. Sometimes the Spirit calls the church to change, grow, and move into unfamiliar territory for the sake of God's mission. Transformation can feel unsettling, but without it we remain stuck behind locked doors, unable to experience the fullness of the life God desires for us.

Pentecost invites us not merely to admire the transformation of the disciples, but to ask whether we ourselves are willing to be transformed by the Spirit of God. Notice that before Pentecost, the disciples were waiting. Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father. That waiting period must have felt uncomfortable. And maybe many of us know that feeling well.

There are moments in life when we also live in between stages. The waiting period between what was and what will be. Sometimes churches experience this. Families experience this and individuals also experience this. We may be grieving a loss. Wondering about the future. We might be waiting on something that is very important that make our life today feel uncertain, like waiting for visa approval for example. And perhaps some of us feeling stuck between endings and beginnings. And in those moments, we are tempted either to cling desperately to the past or to become paralyzed by fear.

But Pentecost reminds us that God often does His transforming work precisely in those uncertain spaces. In the Pentecost story, The Spirit breaks barriers between the disciples, the locked room, and the world beyond their walls. The Spirit refuses to be limited by human divisions. And the same Spirit that rested upon the apostles now rests upon the whole church. Remember, the whole church.

Which simply means that the Spirit is not only for “super spiritual” people. The Spirit is for all of us. Sometimes we think we are too weak, too ordinary, too broken, or too unqualified for God to use us. But if Pentecost teaches us anything, it is that God specializes in using ordinary people.

The disciples themselves were ordinary people. Fishermen. Tax collectors. People with doubts and failures and fears. Yet God filled them with His Spirit and changed the world through them. And perhaps that is important for the church to hear today.

Because many churches today feel tired. Some feel anxious about the future. Some wonder whether the church still has a place in the world. Some Christians feel discouraged by conflict, division, or declining numbers. But Pentecost reminds us that the church was never sustained merely by human strength. The church was born through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The early disciples did not build the church through wealth or influence or perfect strategies. They were sustained by the living presence of God among them. And the same Spirit is still alive today.

Now you might ask, what should I do, then? If you continue read the passage before us from Acts chapter 2, after Peter preached, the people who listened to him ask the same thing,

“³⁷ When the people heard Peter, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:37-38.

For all whom the Lord our God will call. Friends, the Spirit of God does not force transformation upon us. The Spirit invites us. Calls us. Opens possibilities before us. But we must be willing to

surrender. And surrender can be frightening. Transformation means surrender or letting go of who we were so that God can shape who we are becoming.

There are a lot of things I can name that we need to let go personally or as a community of faith. Sometimes it is fear. Sometimes pride. Sometimes bitterness. Sometimes the illusion that we can control everything ourselves. But the Spirit invites us to trust God enough to be changed.

Unfortunately, a lot of people want resurrection without transformation. We want new life without surrender. We want the comfort of faith without the disruption of the Spirit. But Pentecost does not tell us that those are possible.

From the story of Pentecost we learn that the fire of the Spirit is not a fire that destructive in the way human anger destroys. The fire of God purifies. Refines. Renews. Like metal placed into fire, the disciples were reshaped into something stronger and more beautiful for God's mission.

Perhaps today, or in our phase of life, the Spirit is trying to transform our hearts—teaching us compassion where we have become hardened. Perhaps the Spirit is teaching us courage where fear has controlled us. Perhaps the Spirit is teaching us as a church to have hope in a world overwhelmed by despair.

We live in a time when people are increasingly isolated from one another. Politics divide us. Culture divides us. Language divides us. Even churches sometimes become divided because of who they are welcome to their door and not. Yet Pentecost shows us a different vision.

At Babel in Genesis, human pride led to confusion and separation of languages. But at Pentecost, through the Spirit, people hear and understand one another again. The Spirit creates unity not by erasing differences, but by allowing people to hear the good news across those differences. That is the kind of community the church is called to become. And I hope that is what Stamford also see as why we are standing still standing now as a church, as a community of faith in this neighborhood.

A Spirit-filled church is not a church where everyone is identical. It is a church where people are united in Christ despite differences. Where people from different backgrounds belong together. Where forgiveness is practiced and grace is extended. Where the love of Christ becomes visible.

And that kind of community can only exist through the work of the Holy Spirit. Not the work of particular minister or session, or elders. It take the whole church that moved by the same Spirit.

Friends in Christ, remember that Pentecost is not simply a story about what happened two thousand years ago. It is a story about what God continues to do today. Believe me when I say the same Spirit that descended upon the apostles still moves among us. The same Spirit that transformed fearful disciples into courageous witnesses still transforms hearts today. So hopefully our question is no longer whether the Spirit is present because we can't visibly see it. But the question would be are willing to be transformed by the Spirit of God? Because through transformed people, God changes the world.

So today, on this Pentecost Sunday, may we not simply remember the coming of the Holy Spirit as a past event. May we open ourselves anew to the Spirit's presence here and now. May the wind of God breathe fresh life into weary hearts. May the fire of God burn away fear and despair. May the Spirit of God transform us into people who reflect the love, courage, and hope of Jesus Christ.

And like those first disciples, may we leave this place no longer captive to fear, but filled with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen.