

Sermon

How will we respond to these gifts?

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May 28, 2023

The setting at Pentecost, the Jewish feast of Weeks, connects this new revelation with the giving of the law or the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai. Pentecost is Greek for fifty, signifying the fifty days or seven weeks after Passover. Originally an agricultural festival celebrating the end of spring harvest, the feast of Weeks was in the Roman period associated by various strands of Judaism with the covenant. Fire signals the presence of the divine, hence God's self-revelation, as in the burning bush, the descent of God on Sinai, and the fiery chariot of Daniel 7. The same motif occurs in John the Baptist's prophecy that one will come who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" from the Gospel of Luke.

Now I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but if I had asked who truly knows and understand the celebration of Pentecost, I wonder how many of you would have been able to honestly answer yes. It is an interesting celebration – celebrating something that truly we spend most of our faith life trying to really understand – the gift of the Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit is a gentleman," the elders of the Pentecostal church where Jana Childers grew up were fond of saying: "He never forces his way in and goes only where he is invited." Interesting but definitely not what the Holy Spirit is about.

The idea of spirituality and we being spiritual creates, beings, is something I want us to really think through today. You know, one of the things I really like

Inspired by [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#), commentary on Acts 2:1-21 by David M. Bender, Stephen A. Cooper and Jana Childers.

about Christmas is all of the beautiful decorations I see everywhere. At that time of year, I end up going to work in the dark and usually coming home in the dark too but during that time I get to admire some of very talented and committed people who go all out in decorating their homes for the holidays. I generally don't – I'm very bare bones. In fact this year I think the only thing I put out was my plastic mold vintage Santa. Now what's interesting about decorating homes for Christmas is it tells you they are committed to decorating – probably are on some level a believer maybe – not always because most secular decorations really focus on Santa and Reindeer and such, just like mine – rather than Christ...but nonetheless, I truly enjoy it. I really don't know what it might be like inside the house or what the people are like that live there. It tells me next to nothing about that. It's just a case, a box, that somebody lives in and they decided to decorate it.

And this got me thinking about spirituality, about us being spirits. We all have this shell exterior that we were given upon our birth to allow our spirits to walk around this planet and go about the business of being human. And just like those houses, looking only at the exterior of a person doesn't really tell you a whole lot about who they really are. That would take a bit more effort of opening the door and walking in, so to speak. But yet we spend so much time on our shell and we fret about it too. Some of us have tatoos, I like to color my hair, I enjoy wearing make up, buying clothes that I like in colors that are my favorite...but if want to know who I am, looking only at my tatoos, my clothes, my hair – you won't really know me very well...yet the world thinks they do and we think we know others by they look too.

On this day, we acknowledge that Jesus left us with this powerful, amazing, life changing gift that when we tap into it, we can think way beyond our own thinking, our own believing. Because we are limited by a human brain – God has no such limitations and that is why understanding that you are a spiritual being is essential in really appreciating and connecting with the Holy Spirit. It really makes it seem so distracting really to focus any of our attention on physical appearance, including our own.

In our scripture from Acts, Luke describes the crowds as bewildered, amazed, astonished and perplexed. We see them milling around, stepping on each other's toes, faces reddening, voices rising in confusion. It is a picture of Babel. The human community described in Genesis 11 1-9, divided by God into diverse language groups, begins to be mended here. As the Spirit arrives and Peter explains, the confusions of Babel are reversed. Instead of widening confusion, there is dawning comprehension, incipient reunion. What was divided is mended as people speak languages other than their own. Tongues of fire. Don't get caught up in the confusion of the story – rather lean into the communication – the equality, the unification that happens when the people connect with the Holy Spirit.

In its simplest terms, the Holy Spirit is a peacemaker, a teacher, a motivator, an energy that is available to us at anytime whenever we call upon it. The resurrected Christ's words to the disciples in chapter 1 were not subtle: the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon them will empower them to become "witness" to Jesus. Luke reports Peter opening his speech by witnessing to the evidence that

the tongues of the disciples and the words of the prophet bear upon the question of what kind of man Jesus is.

Pentecost is a day to find the spirit within you, claim and utilize your authentic voices, gifts and skills with which you love and serve. The Holy Spirit was let loose that day and is still loose in the world today and remains a gift to the church and to us. The question remains, “how will we respond to these gifts?”