

Pentecost, Year B
May 23, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Stanley Hauerwas, a contemporary theologian and professor at Duke Divinity School began his memoir this way: “I have...tried to live a life I hope is unintelligible if the God we Christians worship does not exist.” What he is trying to say here is that being a Christian empowers us to act certain ways and do certain things. Sometimes the things that we do don’t make sense to those who don’t believe. In fact, sometimes I wonder what a life of faith looks like to those on the outside, those without an active faith. I bet it looks pretty strange. I bet the church and all of us churchgoers look pretty strange to the unchurched, and to those who do not believe.

And I can imagine some of the questions. Why would you wake up early on your only day off to sit in church for an hour? Why would you pay more for a product because it was produced fairly and without exploiting other people? Why would you use the money that *you earned* to feed the poor? Why are you going to a workday at church—don’t you have enough to do at home? How do you find the strength to carry on in the face of despair, fear, and danger?

Sometimes what we do and what we believe doesn’t make sense to non-Christians. Our lives appear to be unintelligible. The answers to these questions, which may be obvious or automatic for some, are unclear and confusing for others.

But in the time after the resurrection, I imagine the disciples felt as though they were unintelligible in their world, too. They had experienced the presence of the risen Christ, they ate with him, and they watched him ascend into heaven. I’m sure, as they were trying to make sense of this, and share the good news with others, at least some of the people they met were skeptical and confused.

Today we find ourselves gathered with the disciples, still in Jerusalem, for the festival of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish festival in which people from all over the known world traveled to Jerusalem to make sacrifices. The disciples found themselves in the midst of this diversity, as they remained in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them to do. And so, the disciples are gathered together in a house as we enter our story today. Our passage then tells us that “Suddenly from heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared over each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in different languages as they had received ability from the Spirit.” Now this must have caused quite the commotion, it must have gotten people’s attention, because a crowd gathered and was confused. All the disciples were from Galilee, and would not have known the native languages for all those gathered in Jerusalem. It doesn’t make sense that suddenly everyone was able to hear and understand in their native language.

Some people wrote this off, claiming “they are filled with new wine”. But Peter denied this since it was only 9:00 in the morning. Certainly, they were not drunk, but this is how it appeared to those who had not yet experienced the work of the Holy Spirit.

I think we too live in a world that often looks at Christians and says, “They are filled with new wine”. People don’t always understand our actions. Jesus lived in a time when his ideas were radical. The disciples were the first to experience what this radical lifestyle meant for them and the ways in which they related to the world. We today find ourselves still living in a world where Christian ideas are counter-cultural. We live in a world where plenty of people have not experienced God for themselves. So, people don’t understand our actions. They go against the

ways that mainstream society and the media suggest that we live our lives. Maybe people wonder if we are drunk, filled with new wine, or just plain crazy.

So why do we do it? Why do we continue to live this life that seems unintelligible, senseless and in counter-cultural? We do it because we can't help ourselves. Just like the disciples proclaiming God's word and speaking in tongues at Pentecost, we can't help but reach out and care for the community around us. Just like the disciples, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are empowered to bring love, and hope, and healing to our weary world.

In our baptism and as we celebrate the Eucharist each week, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that's what makes us different, that's what empowers us. We have encountered God—in baptism, in the Eucharist, and in our daily encounters—and **God has changed our lives**. Just as God sent the Spirit on the disciples and all those gathered in our passage from Acts today, God sends the Spirit on us too.

And the gift of the Spirit drives us out into the world for service and proclamation. The disciples' ministry didn't stop at Pentecost. That was just the beginning. They continued working and traveling and proclaiming God's love to all the ends of the world. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples left that house in Jerusalem and went out into the world baptizing people in God's name, casting out demons, feeding the poor, caring for widows, and defending the outcasts. The Spirit gave them the strength and energy to do this work in God's name despite what others around them were saying.

And the same is true for us. Even if the gift of the Holy Spirit makes us do things that look crazy or unintelligible to the rest of the world, we still have work to do. God has called us to a living, active faith, and God has empowered us with the Holy Spirit to do that work.

In the Holy Spirit, and by God's endless love, we have been given gifts to serve, and these gifts allow us to serve our communities in various ways. This service can be carried out through our professions as doctors, nurses, accountants, business owners, public service employees, teachers, farmers, and many more. Or these gifts can be used to serve the community as volunteers—serving the hungry through King's Kupboard, knitting a prayer shawl for someone going through a difficult time, cooking a meal for a friend in need, praying for someone in need of God's comfort and love. This is the Holy Spirit in action. Maybe you never thought you'd be giving of yourself and your time in these ways, but God leads us to amazing work, work that can only be done when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

And maybe it doesn't make sense to the world around us. Maybe the Christian life truly is unintelligible to those outside the church. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we serve our community rather than just ourselves, and we share God's love rather than staying wrapped up in our love of self. God has called and empowered us to live lives of service and proclamation. We spend our lives doing holy work through the Spirit that dwells in each of us. And we do this work because God has loved us first, God has saved us through Jesus Christ on the cross, and God has filled us with the Spirit. And so, let us give thanks to God for sending the Spirit upon us, and for emboldening us to carry God's love into our world. Thanks be to God. Amen.