

6.05.22 – Day of Pentecost
“Can We Hear the Tongues of Fire?”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Numbers 28:26-31 (HCSB, Holman Christian Standard Bible) ~ Pam

Offerings for the Festival of Weeks

²⁶ “On the day of first fruits, you are to hold a sacred assembly when you present an offering of new grain to the Lord at your Festival of Weeks; you are not to do any daily work. ²⁷ Present a burnt offering for a pleasing aroma to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, ²⁸ with their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, six quarts with each bull, four quarts with the ram, ²⁹ and two quarts with each of the seven lambs, ³⁰ and one male goat to make atonement for yourselves. ³¹ Offer them with their drink offerings in addition to the regular burnt offering and its grain offering. Your animals are to be unblemished.

L: These are early Words of Instruction from God. C: Thanks be to God!

Acts 2:1-21 (NIV) ~ Pam

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

¹ When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ““In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,

- I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
- ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
- ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
- ²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

L: These are Amazing Words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear God, who speaks to us still today, let us hear you in the rushing wind and tongues of fire you sent upon your disciples. Let us be your disciples today with open minds and hearts to see the flames, but more importantly hear your motivation, your voice, and direction. We gather again in community this week to share communion and receive the power of the Holy Spirit for ourselves as we remember your teachings, your sacrifice and promise. Please speak this messenger too.

“Amen.”

Shhh. Can you hear it? Can you hear the rushing wind descending? Can you see the separate tongues of fire resting on those gathered? Can you hear the many languages spoken through the Spirit and tongues of fire? We wear red sometimes this day to symbolize that fire, to help our imaginations experience such a divine moment. Pentecost, also called Whitsunday, (from Greek *pentecostē*, “50th day”), a major festival in the Christian church, is celebrated on the Sunday that falls on the 50th day of Easter. As you know, it commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples following the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and it marks the beginning of the Christian church’s mission to the world, and some say the beginning of the Christian church itself.

But first, let us glance briefly at the Numbers 28 passage; the beginning of that chapter outlines offerings and sacrifices needed for

festivals and feast celebrations of Hebrew history. We no longer are required to sacrifice to God in the temple since Jesus lived, but we do remember His sacrifice for us through our communion observance on the first Sunday of each month, Good Friday, and Christmas Eve. On the one-day Festival of First Fruits in our passage, the people brought the initial yields of their harvest to the temple as a thank offering to God. There were other similar rituals in the Feast of Weeks, and the later Festival of Harvest (at the end of that season). You can read more in Exodus and Numbers; commentaries have charts to show what animal or plant was required for offering.

Did you know that the word “Pentecost” was also used in the Old Testament? According to Wikipedia, the date of the "Feast of Weeks" originally came the day after seven full weeks following the first harvest of grain (7 wks x7 days = 49 days). In Jewish tradition the 50th day was known as the Festival of Weeks. The actual mention of 50 days comes from Leviticus 23:16.

The term Pentecost was later used for this 50th day after Christ’s Resurrection as I mentioned earlier. Let’s put ourselves on the disciples’ timeline. They were still overcome by fear, grief, and confusion over what they experienced in the death of Jesus on the Cross, his resurrection, and their fear of Roman persecution. They may have even felt lost or abandoned, yet they all met together in that upper room when they witnessed Jesus ascend to his father. Because of Judas’ betrayal and suicide, there were only eleven apostles to carry on Jesus’ ministry so they needed another:

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so, he was added to the eleven apostles (Acts 1:23-26).”

There was probably a time of discussion and preparation for the ministry that Luke does not share, so we jump right into Pentecost. Acts 2 is not the story of man trying to figure out the work of the Holy Spirit or who this Advocate is that Jesus told them about (found in John 14-16). Rather, in this account, we hear and see the Holy Spirit descend from heaven and touch their hearts with desire to spread the Gospel. Those present had a divine experience, not an intellectual or studious one. The spirit also opened the minds of these present by allowing them to understand a multitude of their native languages important as they dispersed into other lands to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

I have three questions for you this morning to ponder this week or as we share our communion together later.

1. Can we hear the rushing wind and faith languages? Or are we so busy with our lives, finding things to do to entertain or purchase that we don’t spend time listening for God?
2. If we hear something like the wind and fire of Pentecost, how are we discerning God’s voice and direction to us in it? Are we using the Inward, Outward, and Corporate Spiritual Disciplines (found in Richard Foster’s classic book “Celebration of the Disciplines”) or recent prayer tools to prepare us to receive the Spirit? Silence, solitude, confession, meditation, celebration, service, journaling, and others are needed.
3. What are we hearing this special day as we “Listen for the Work in Worship?” The disciples were gathered together and had been carefully prepared by Jesus to receive the Advocate

who would empower them to carry on his ministry without him. Do we hear the chaos and confusion of this divine event? Or do we feel a sudden calm, indwelling of the Holy Spirit to nudge us forward into the community, into the mission field of our neighborhoods. Are we spiritually prepared?

Remember, from Acts 1:15, there were 120 Christ followers in the upper room, a multitude of diverse nationalities and cultures, yet the Holy Spirit came upon them all (no favorites!). Peter's speech was his first sermon telling the 120 and eventually over 3,000+ who gathered about Jesus' life, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Peter helped to interpret this divine event for the multitudes, showing that Jesus was the Messiah; those words empowered by the Holy Spirit motivated the baptized to go out and spread the word. This is one reason Peter is considered the founder of the Christian church. Jesus used a play on words in Matthew 16:18: "You are Peter (*petros*) and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church."

Christ, of course is the foundation of the church, so he sent an Advocate to motivate and empower the apostles to go forth into the world. The Holy Spirit can do the same for us here today if we are prayerful and willing. Let us be open and obedient to how the Spirit is working to further God's influence in the world. Remember last week's comment that, like the disciples, at the moment of crisis or grief, there is an open door for faith. Remember your calling to share the gospel with others. If you want to know more about how Pentecost started everything, read the rest of Acts, especially Chapter 2. Can you hear the rushing wind in your lives? Can you see and hear the tongues of fire? What are you going to do about it? Amen.//

Will you pray with me? Motivating and empowering Spirit, through you and because of you, we are called to share Christ's story. We thank you for your incarnate Son, Jesus, and his Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Help us to listen more carefully for divine guidance and intervention. Help others to see that supernatural power in us as we go about our days. May we go from here with new power through your body, blood, and spirit, refreshed and renewed, ready to be a faith example for others. **Amen.**