

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

I am so very happy I am preaching today because I get to talk about one of my very favourite topics. The Holy Spirit! You may have heard me say that you can take the girl out of the Pentecostal Church, but you can't take Pentecost out of the girl! My faith journey began in the Catholic Charismatic movement of the 1970's. In my teens Dad was transferred to North Bay and my parents decided on a Pentecostal Church. One of the benefits of growing up in this tradition is the focus on the whole Trinity; all three Persons: Creator God, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic Renewal of the 70s, 80's and even 90's was a gift to many mainline denominations. It reminded many Christians that the Holy Spirit was not merely a doctrine to confess, but a living presence to encounter.

But the story of Pentecost begins long before the rushing wind and tongues of fire. Long before frightened disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Long before Peter raised his voice to preach. Pentecost begins in the fields. It begins with harvest.

The Jewish festival that we call Pentecost is Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks. It arrives seven weeks after Passover, at the time of first fruits, when the wheat harvest begins. Pilgrims came to Jerusalem to celebrate and give thanks for the goodness of the earth and the faithfulness of God. Shavuot was a creation and agricultural centred festival. Bread was baked from newly harvested grain. The life of the community was bound to soil, rain, seed, and sun. Psalm 104 sings of a world alive with creatures, seas, mountains, and living things that depend upon the breath of God. "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground." (Ps 104:30) The Spirit renews the earth itself.

Over time, Shavuot also became associated with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. By the first century, it carried both the joy of harvest and the memory of revelation. Bread and covenant. Creation and instruction.

In my research I studied the ancient Book of Jubilees, a Jewish text deeply valued in Second Temple communities and known to Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. By the way, Second Temple refers to the period of time the second Temple existed in Jerusalem, roughly from 516 BCE to its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. Jubilees places extraordinary emphasis on the third month of the ancient Jewish Calendar. Again and again, covenantal moments happen in this sacred season. Noah's covenant after the flood is connected with the third month. Abraham's covenant appears in the third month. The giving of the commandments on Mount Sinai happened in the third month. Jubilees presents this period as a season of renewal, covenant, cleansing, and divine encounter.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament the Spirit is consistently associated with renewal, cleansing, transformation, and life. The communities of the Second Temple period already spoke about the Spirit as active in moral and spiritual renewal long before the events of Acts. Pentecost does not introduce a previously absent Spirit. Rather, Pentecost reveals the overflowing abundance of the Spirit already at work in creation and covenant history. The writing of the community I closely researched placed the Holy Spirit at the centre of their experience of God. This is a community on the shores of the Dead Sea which had at least 10 pools for purity immersion and yet their writing declares that no one will be cleansed, purified, or sanctified by these waters alone. That this only happens through the Holy Spirit! And their annual covenant renewal ceremony happened in the third month too!

The timing of Pentecost in Acts is therefore not accidental. Luke places the outpouring of the Spirit within this sacred calendar of covenant renewal. The disciples gather during Shavuot, during the season associated with Sinai, revelation, and covenant. Jewish pilgrims from across the known world are already present in Jerusalem. The city is full of prayer, memory, scripture, and expectation. And into that sacred season comes wind. Fire. Speech. The echoes of Sinai are everywhere. At Sinai there was fire and divine speech. At Pentecost there is fire and divine speech. At Sinai the covenant gathered Israel. At Pentecost the Spirit gathers people from every nation. At Sinai the Torah was given. At Pentecost the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh.

Luke is not replacing Judaism with Christianity. He is presenting Pentecost as the continuation of God's covenantal work within Israel's story. The Spirit descends during one of Israel's great festivals because the church is born from within the life of Jewish faith and hope. And the imagery Luke chooses is rich with creation itself. There comes "a sound like the rush of a violent wind." In Hebrew and Greek alike, breath, wind, and spirit belong to the same family of meaning. The breath of God hovers over the waters in Genesis. God breathes life into Adam. Ezekiel watches the breath of God enter dry bones. Pentecost is filled with creation language because the Spirit is renewing the world.

Luke describes divided tongues as of fire resting upon each person gathered there. Each person. The fire distributes itself through the whole community. This is one of the profound gifts of Pentecost. The Spirit is shared. The presence of God is not concentrated in a single king, prophet, or priest. Joel's prophecy is fulfilled: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." Sons and daughters. Young and old. Servants and free. The Spirit moves through the whole people of God.

And then comes the miracle of hearing. Jerusalem is crowded with pilgrims from across the diaspora. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Egypt and Rome and Arabia gather in bewilderment because each hears the disciples speaking in their own native language. The Spirit does not erase difference. Languages remain languages. Cultures remain cultures. Diversity remains. The Spirit brings unity not uniformity!

This brings us to a vital question: How do we live this out? Paul addresses this in his first letter to the Corinthians. He is concerned that they are manifesting the gifts of the Spirit without manifesting the fruits of the Spirit. The Corinthians had become fascinated with the dramatic and visible gifts, and Paul gently but firmly reminds them that every gift, every act of service, every movement of grace comes from the same Divine source. Again and again, almost like the rhythm of a prayer, Paul repeats the pattern: there are varieties ... but the same Spirit; varieties ... but the same Lord; varieties ... but the same God. In this beautiful triad, we catch one of the earliest glimpses of the Church speaking about the mystery of the Trinity. The Spirit, the Lord Christ, and God the Creator are all at work within the life of the community. Paul names gifts, services, and activities together because he wants the Corinthians to understand something essential: the Holy Spirit is not only present in what appears miraculous or extraordinary. The Spirit is also present in teaching, leading, helping, encouraging, serving, giving, and caring for others. What we might dismiss as “ordinary” human abilities, Paul sees as holy manifestations of divine grace. Across his letters, Paul offers several lists of the gifts of the Spirit. Some are dramatic and mysterious: healing, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. Others seem quieter: wisdom, leadership, generosity, compassion, teaching, encouragement, acts of assistance. Still others

are vocational gifts given to the Church: apostles, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Taken together, these lists reveal that the Spirit does not create one kind of Christian. The Spirit creates a living body with many forms of grace flowing through many different people. And none of these gifts are earned. Paul is insistent about this. The gifts don't come through status, achievement, intelligence, holiness, or "works of the law." They are given through grace. The Spirit activates them, awakens them, distributes them according to divine wisdom and love. Even faith itself, Paul says, is sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. Even hope is breathed into us by God. Which means that the Christian life is not simply self-improvement. It is transformation. The believer becomes a person enlarged by grace. A person reshaped from within. A person still unfinished, still becoming, still learning how to let the life of the Spirit reach deeper into the heart. Yet, Paul warns us: "If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong." The gifts of the Spirit must be activated by love. We know this is the case because of the evidence—the fruits of the Spirit: love, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Even the most dazzling spiritual experience becomes empty if it does not lead us toward compassion and care for one another. The Spirit does not simply empower the Church; the Spirit transforms the Church. Paul's image is wonderfully physical. "We were all made to drink of one Spirit." Drink of one Spirit. The language liquid, embodied, life-giving.

In the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple literature, the Spirit is frequently imagined through water imagery. God pours out the Spirit like rain upon dry ground. Water and Spirit together become signs of blessing, renewal, and new

creation. The prophets envisioned a day when the Spirit would be poured out abundantly upon Israel and the nations.

Pentecost is Luke's proclamation that this long-awaited season has begun. The dry ground is receiving rain. The breath of God is moving through humanity. And all of this takes place in Jerusalem during a harvest festival. And harvest my friends is never instantaneous. Seeds disappear into darkness long before the grain appears. Roots deepen invisibly before fields ripen in the sun. Pentecost reminds us that God often works through hidden growth before visible transformation arrives. The disciples themselves are still learning this. In John's Gospel, the disciples gather behind locked doors. Fear still clings to them. Grief still lives in their bodies. Questions still remain unanswered. And Jesus comes among them and says, "Peace be with you." Then he breathes on them. He breathes on them! The image is tender and intimate. The risen Christ breathes the Holy Spirit into fearful hearts. John's Gospel echoes Genesis here. Humanity first came alive through the breath of God, and now the church comes alive through the breath of the risen Christ. The Spirit enters not through force, but through breath.

One of the beautiful tensions within the New Testament is that the Spirit appears both as rushing wind and as gentle breath. The same Spirit who shakes the house in Acts also moves softly through locked rooms in John. The Spirit comes in ways large enough to renew communities and intimate enough to heal wounded hearts. And in John's Gospel the gift of the Spirit is immediately connected to forgiveness. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." (John 20:23) The Spirit forms communities capable of reconciliation. Communities who carry their scars just as Jesus still bears the marks of crucifixion in his resurrected body. Resurrection does not erase suffering from memory. Yet those wounds no longer

define the future. The Spirit opens the possibility of life beyond fear, beyond violence, beyond estrangement. That work continues now.

Pentecost is not simply a story about something that happened once. It is the continuing reality of God breathing life into the world. The Spirit still renews creation. The Spirit who renewed the covenant in the third month still gathers people into new community and breathes new life into old communities. She still awakens gifts within ordinary people. The Spirit still creates understanding across barriers of language, culture, politics, and history. She still pours living water into dry places. Perhaps Pentecost invites us to notice where that renewal is already unfolding around us. Where is the Spirit breathing new life into your heart? Where is the Spirit gathering in our community?

May we all be open to the holy, transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit come.

AMEN.