

Pentecost (A)
May 31, 2020
Texts: Acts 2:1-21
John 14:15-21

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I'd like to call your attention to the prayer that we all prayed together earlier in the service. We prayed: Come, Holy Spirit, to all the baptized, that we may turn to good whatever lies ahead. Give us passion, give us fire; make us transform the world from what it is, to what you have created it to be. (New Zealand Prayerbook)

When you stop and think about it, that's really a pretty audacious prayer—turning to good whatever lies ahead; transforming the world from what it is, to what God created it to be. It's clear to me that the world as-it-is is decidedly not what God intends. What do you think it would look like if this world was like God created it to be?

I'd like to ask our confirmands, Lily Frasier and Trey Kekow, to help with answering those questions by sharing a little bit of what they learned over the past year. We've been reading through this book, "Manna and Mercy." It pictures the Bible as the story of God's dream to heal the universe. So Lily and Trey, what would be different if this world were the way God created it to be? (Lily: Enough for everyone; no hunger or poverty. Trey: No war, no violence. Lily: People wouldn't take advantage of each other, no fear. Trey: No racism, everyone equal, no outcasts; inclusive community.)

That is a really big dream. It sounds like the complete transformation of life as we know it, and it's the work God is inviting all of us to participate in. I wonder whether to accomplish all of that would require something like a superpower. Maybe like Superman or Wonder Woman, or maybe Iron Man or the Hulk? Can you even imagine what kind of strength would it take to defeat the powers that create poverty or violence, or fear or racism? What kind of amazing superpower would that be?!

Well, here's the thing—you already have superpowers. You may not have realized it before, but the power is there. You have superpowers, and you just have to know they're there to tap into them. Your superpowers comes from the Spirit of God. And the Spirit of God is all about defeating the powers of sin and death, undoing the powers that create poverty and violence and fear and racism.

The surprising part—or maybe it's the unsettling part—is that your superpowers, which come from the Spirit of God, don't look like what we might usually think of as superpowers. You can't leap tall buildings in a single bound. You can't go faster than a speeding train. You can't smash the bad guys with fists of steel. Your superpowers look more like the ability to love your neighbor as yourself, and even to love your enemies. Your superpowers include the ability to forgive when someone does something wrong to you, and the ability to overcome estrangement and renew relationships. Your superpowers include the ability to be humble, and generous, and bring an open heart to people who are different than you. One of your

superpowers is nurturing inclusive, welcoming, safe community. Your superpowers also include a hunger for justice and truth.

Now, if you're wondering whether those are really superpowers, just consider the long, sad history of how the human family has lived together. Who has had the greatest impact on society for the good—those who put themselves first and smashed their enemies and were ruthless in pursuing their goals? Or those who looked beyond their own wants or desires to serve others, who exercised forgiveness and restraint, and who pursued something greater than their own cause? Who left the greatest imprint on the world, for good—Pontius Pilate, or Jesus of Nazareth? Who left the most lasting mark on the world for good—Bull Connor, the Alabama politician who used fire hoses and police dogs against peaceful civil rights protesters, or Martin Luther King, Jr, who led the peaceful civil rights movement? Whose legacy will be remembered and valued—P.W. Botha, the South African Prime Minister who defended apartheid, or Nelson Mandela, who led the way in dismantling apartheid?

And here's the most important part. Your superpowers aren't something that you possess as an individual. They're something that we all share and experience only as a community that supports and cares for each other. Maybe think of it this way. Let me ask Lily and Trey one more question. What is the role of people of faith in God's big dream of healing the universe? (To be a contrast society) That's right. As people of faith, empowered by God's Spirit, we live in a way that is a contrast to the values people are living by all around us, to show what God's values look like. God's values are compassion and forgiveness and reconciliation. God's values are generosity and sharing and inclusion. And the power to live by those values, instead of being taken over by the values of the world around us, that power comes from God's Spirit.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, when we give praise to God for the gift of God's Spirit to be the defining and motivating power for God's people. Pentecost is all about the Spirit empowering us, through our shared life together, to be that contrast society. When we live as Jesus' community together, we experience the power of God's Spirit to make us bold about compassion and bold about forgiveness. In our worship and attending to scripture together, in putting our hands to compassionate work, in doing the hard work of caring for the vulnerable and seeking justice and renewing relationships—the Spirit is giving us the power and the perspective to reflect Jesus' way of love in our lives, individually and as a community together.

Pentecost isn't just something long ago. God's Spirit is still at work through us, through the witness we give to God's saving love by our service and hospitality and generosity and welcoming community, by how we live with compassion and forgiveness and justice. And God's work is reaching through the generations—from those first followers of Jesus, through the centuries to us, now to Lily and Trey, and on into a future we can't even imagine—until the world has been transformed, so that it truly does reflect what God created it to be. Thanks and praise be to God. Amen