

Pentecost (C)
June 5, 2022
Texts: John 14:23-29
Acts 2:1-21

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Pentecost is a festival of power and hope. In the midst of overwhelming news from the past couple of weeks, I believe it is so important to remember that in Christ we are never helpless. We are never powerless, because there is a power flowing through us, through our life together, to resist and fight against paralysis and silence. There is a power flowing through us and through our life together to resist and fight fear and dehumanization. That power is the Spirit of God. The Spirit doesn't fight with violence and is not driven by hate. The weapons the Spirit fights with are things like compassion and connection and community. And if there was ever a time when we needed to plug into that power, now is that time. This morning I want to explore with you how we do that, how we plug into the Spirit's power.

This morning, we heard how the Holy Spirit energized the first followers of Jesus to share the good news of God's love in a variety of languages, so that the Parthians, Medes, Elamites and all the others could all hear that the message of Jesus was for them. But I worry, though, because that is so dramatically different from our daily lives, it might end up making the Holy Spirit seem distant, or exotic. If we are to plug into the Spirit's power, we need to know and feel that the Holy Spirit is as close to us as our own breath. The Spirit is the glue that holds this community together and energizes us to be God's people in the world. The Spirit draws us in to Jesus' way of love and inspires us to forgiveness and love of enemies and compassion for neighbors in need.

The best analogy I can think of to help you picture the closeness of the Spirit is: "team spirit." If you've ever played on a sports team of any kind, or if you've ever gone to root for the Timbers, you probably have a good sense for what team spirit is. You've seen the flags and scarves waving, and heard the drums and chanting, you've smelled the green smoke roiling and wafting across the crowd. There's an energy about everything that connects the players to each other and brings out the best in them. It unites the team and the fans to supercharge the players. It gives a feeling of belonging and vitality and drive to everyone involved. That's team spirit. I have seen a group of average players beat a team of all-stars because they played with team spirit. I don't know how to explain what happens psychologically or interpersonally, but team spirit is real. Team spirit empowers and enlivens everyone it touches.

As people of God, we have our own kind of team spirit. In this community, I have experienced a spirit that is consistently joyful. We may not always be perfectly cheerful—we can get frustrated at times, but whether it's in music or personal connections, there's a kind of joy-filled open-heartedness about our life together. There is a warmth here that I genuinely treasure. In this community, I have also experienced a kind of creative, open-minded willingness to try new things for the sake of the Gospel. I can tell you that not every Christian community is like that, but I love that you have a willingness to take risks if it's an expression of God's love for the world. And in this community, I have witnessed deep compassion and generosity for neighbors

in need, as an expression of Jesus' love. That's how I've seen the "team spirit" of this Christian community. And here's the big claim—the team spirit that enlivens and energizes and guides us in our life together is nothing less than the presence of God, the Holy Spirit. In our life together, the God who created the universe, who revealed God's self in the life of Jesus, is present among us and can be felt as the "team spirit" that leads us in Jesus' way of love. And when we are energized and directed by God's presence among us, we are not helpless or powerless at all.

For us, then, to plug into the Spirit's power, I can think of three essential attitudes or actions for being available to that power.

The first is to show up. Whether we show up on Zoom or show up in person, we show up as a member of the community, as a participant, not a spectator. This might be a little difficult. The pandemic has caused so much isolation that you might feel out of practice. But when we come together, it's not just to receive the beautiful music or receive reflection on scripture. We come together to sing our praise to God and raise our prayers to God and wrestle in our hearts with how Christ is speaking to us today through the words of scripture. And we come together to be a community, both online and in person, where we share ourselves and attend to each other. We make friends, share caring, be human together—we belong to each other. There's a beautiful mutuality about being a community. We come together to be part of something bigger than ourselves, to be part of how this community is one expression of God's compassion and commitment to the world. We trust that God's Spirit is present and at work here, so we show up.

And secondly, we share our gifts. Every one of us is gifted by God so that we can participate in God's work to bring healing to this world. We have gifts of time, we have gifts of making connections with each other, we have gifts for serving neighbors in need. We have gifts that are emotional or intellectual or physical. We have gifts to be compassionate or generous or encouraging. We have gifts of money or abilities. It might look like mowing the yard or power washing the sidewalk. It might look like sending a card to someone in the hospital. It might look like setting up for a picnic, or working with others on how we as a congregation can reach out to our neighborhood in creative ways. None of us has all the gifts, but every one of us has something. Being a participant in this community, where the Spirit of God is at work, means bringing our whole selves, together with whatever gifts God has given us. We bring open eyes and open hearts, making ourselves available for works of beauty or compassion or justice or generosity. We trust that God's Spirit is present and at work here, so we share our gifts.

And finally, in our life together we permit ourselves to be shaped by Jesus. We pay attention to Jesus and his way of compassion and forgiveness, love of enemies, generosity and humility. If we're not paying attention to Jesus, it will be some other spirit that guides us. Jesus was quite clear that merely calling on him as Lord means nothing. What is necessary for our spiritual health is to pay attention to Jesus' teachings and be shaped by them. In our Gospel reading, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will remind us and lead us in Jesus' word and Jesus' way. So in our life together, we bring open hearts to Jesus, and we let his values define our values. We let Jesus' practices of love direct our actions. We let Jesus' priorities become our priorities. For example,

our Forum group is learning about racism and how we can be part of a solution rather than part of the problem. Our Oregon Synod approved action to advocate for a sensible response to gun violence. A group of volunteers for First Immanuel participated in a neighborhood clean-up. It was both caring for our neighbors and caring for God's creation. We trust that God's Spirit is present and at work here, so we open our hearts to be shaped by Jesus.

I believe that when we show up, and share our gifts, and let ourselves be shaped by Jesus, we will experience God's very real power in us and among us. We will experience the power of Jesus' love that will not let us be pounded into silence and will not let us be paralyzed, but instead be energized, be fully alive and engaged in God's world. We will experience the Holy Spirit as the "team spirit" that keeps us connected to each other, that enlivens and directs us to be God's people in the world. In the power of God's Spirit, we can grieve for lives lost to senseless gun violence. In the power of God's Spirit, we can call for justice for the vulnerable. In the power of God's Spirit, we can find partners to work with to serve God's purposes of compassion and healing. In the power of God's Spirit, we can be energized to care for God's beloved world, or create inclusive, supportive communities. In the power of God's Spirit, we will not be driven by fear or driven to despair. We will not give up on our neighbors and we will not be satisfied with our own little life. In the power of God's Spirit, we will be brave enough to have our hearts broken by love for this beautiful, wounded world, and to trust God for comfort and strength and healing.

Dear people of God, we will never be helpless or powerless, because the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love and compassion, is within us and among us. And that gracious, loving power is the only power capable of bringing healing to this world with strength and might and everlasting love. So come, Holy Spirit. Amen.