

The Festival of Pentecost, A  
Acts 2:1-21  
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13  
John 20:19-23

Pastor Melinda J. Wagner  
First Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Portland, Oregon  
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Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit which is God's presence with us today and always. We don't meet God in person today, the way people did during those very few years when Jesus Christ lived on earth. But God is with us, we are never alone. Today the Spirit of Christ is in the airwaves, in the heart-waves, the brainwaves, alive in people, infusing our existence ... the way God's Spirit has always been alive, moving across the waters at creation, inspiring visions for prophets, keeping God's people together when forces threatened to tear them apart.

We don't have to be in person with someone for them to influence us. I know an elderly man who was estranged from his brother for many years. By the grace of God they've now reconnected, but they live far apart and probably will not be able to meet in person before the end of their earthly lives. They use phone calls and zoom to share everyday conversation and corny humor. They cannot touch or hug, but still they are real to one another. They influence each other in a real and meaningful way.

Maybe it's something like this with us and God. The Creator God isn't absent— just present in a different way. Present not just to a few people in the Middle East 2,000 years ago – God is present today to all people, infusing all of us, influencing all of us in ways we may or may not perceive. Faith is not about tracking God's movements – it's about welcoming God's influence.

God's Spirit is often compared to breath or wind. You can't see the wind, but you can see its effects, branches swaying, clouds traveling, waves forming on still water. A person's breath is invisible, but as breath fills our lungs it revives our whole body, it keeps us alive. We perceive God's Spirit through its effects.

And what are the effects of God's Spirit in today's scriptures? I see God's Spirit meeting people in the midst of difficulties and equipping them to respond and thrive and be active in love.

In the gospel of John, the disciples were hiding in an upper room, locked down in fear that the people who crucified Jesus might come after them too. But Jesus didn't make the locks stronger so they could keep hiding. Instead, Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and gave them the Peace the world cannot give. Peace not only to calm their fears but to break fear's hold and get them out from behind those closed doors. "As God

has sent me, so I send you,” Jesus said. God’s Spirit gave them peace and courage and a mission – of forgiveness, generosity, and bold outreaching love.

In the book of Acts the disciples were also in a holding pattern of sorts, waiting together in a private house, until on Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrived with something like sparking flames and the whoosh of a violent wind. The Spirit shooed them right out of that house into the streets. Gave them ability to speak at least 15 new languages to communicate with perfect strangers. The obvious message being, their mission was to take God’s love beyond familiar walls -- however, wherever, whenever they could.

In the small church community at Corinth, people were quite prideful about how spiritual and special they were, but they tended to hoard God’s gifts. Paul reminded them their God-given talents were meant for the common good – to build up the congregation, to strengthen the witness, to help Christ’s body work together better.

We catch the drift, don’t we? The Spirit’s breezy momentum moves in an outward direction motivated by God’s love for all people. God’s Spirit introduces us to neighbors, God’s Spirit equips us to reach beyond our comfort zone, God’s Spirit strengthens faith to overcome fear and take courage, God’s Spirit comes alongside us and gives us what we need to work for the common good. *(thanks to David Lose, “in the meantime” 5/31/2017)*

This Pentecost I’m inclined to be very practical in preaching about God’s Spirit. Because I believe God is extremely practical in the ways God equips God’s people to be of use in this hurting world. None of us needs reminding of how much pain and dysfunction surround us at this point in history. And one way God’s Spirit responds is to inspire hearts, strengthen us inwardly. Yet God’s Spirit also spurs us to act outwardly, to exert a positive influence for the sake of God’s love and justice and peace and truth.

Saint Paul’s phrase “for the common good” is one we’ve used a lot in our forum discussions recently, as we’ve reflected on faith and civic life. Christ’s calling is clear: we’re meant to love our neighbor, live in community, and seek the common good.

The common good doesn’t mean just preserving the status quo for me and my family, or preserving “the way things have always been.” Promoting the common good means promoting wellbeing for all people. Justice is a biblical principle which means all people are treated fairly and all people have what they need to live. Justice gives special attention to people who are usually left behind, the vulnerable ones.

Our forum has discovered that God’s Holy Spirit is extremely active in our common life. In just our relatively small group, people shared how their faith motivated them to exercise their citizenship in an amazing variety of ways:

*Someone worked for the census, going door to door to ensure all people could be represented.*

*Another one volunteered for a political candidate they believed in.*

*Another person votes regularly after doing careful research.*

*Somebody represented their union of hospital workers in contract negotiations, which were significant for the whole community depending on good health care.*

*Somebody else wrote a letter to the county to protest neglectful conditions at the animal shelter.*

*Another attended interfaith advocacy days and met with legislators to discuss proposals around poverty and hunger.*

*Another went to public hearings on affordable housing and submitted personal statements to aid deliberations.*

*Still another person subscribes to several advocacy email lists and frequently sends messages to let their concerns be known.*

*Someone worked in health care advocating for vulnerable elders, promoting a safety net of care necessary for our city.*

*Another is a teacher who stepped up for committee assignments at district level.*

*Another person ran for the school board in their hometown.*

*There is someone who walks in rallies and nonviolent protests.*

*Still another gives their energy specifically to environmental causes, preserving wild spaces.*

*And that's not even every activity that was shared...*

I hope you see what I see – and that you will marvel with me at the amazing variety of ways God's Spirit is active for good, not just through our small congregation but all throughout this human family God loves and cherishes and inspires. It's easy to get discouraged sometimes – but never forget God's Holy Spirit. God's creative, resilient, inventive, persistent, breezy and stormy Spirit that never stops being active for the common good.

The good news is, there's not just one way to serve God. Pentecost reminds us that God's Spirit works in a beautiful rainbow of ways to let God's love take shape. People

who see the world in black and white, right and wrong, holy and unholy – are missing the point. Pentecost shows us God multicolored, multitalented, multilingual, multicultural, God sending people out and bringing people together. God blessing and empowering a variety of gifts. God coming alongside us even in the thorniest situations, so we can be part of God healing the universe, our planet, our nation, our city, our neighborhood.

God's Spirit gives every person beautiful gifts to use for the common good. Including you. Including me. Thanks be to God. Amen.