



DAY OF PENTECOST - 2020

Today's festival derives its name from the Jewish festival of Pentecost, observed fifty days after Passover. On the fiftieth day of Easter we celebrate the Holy Spirit as the power of God among us that heals, forgives, inspires, and unites. In the reading from Acts, images of wind and fire describe the Spirit poured out on disciples of all nations. In John's gospel the risen Christ breathes the Spirit on his followers on Easter evening. In the one Spirit we are baptized into one body, and at the Lord's table the Spirit unites us for witness in the world.

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth. (Ps. 104:30)

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 20:19-23

Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival that marked the fiftieth day after Passover. Luke portrays the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the disciples before the gathered and astonished people assembled in Jerusalem for the festival. Filled with the Spirit, the disciples were able to witness to the power of Christ's resurrection.

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Paul is helping the Corinthians understand the relationship between our God-given unity and Spirit-created diversity. The Spirit creates the unity of faith and gives all Christians diverse gifts for the common benefit of all. We need one another's diverse spiritual gifts, because the same Spirit has given them to each person for the common good.

GOSPEL: John 20:19-23

The risen Jesus appears to his disciples, offering them a benediction, a commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Meditation

It is indeed fitting that as we gather on this day, we return to the Scriptures, especially in the present of today's happenings. In these readings we are introduced to the ancient meaning of Pentecost and then in 1 Corinthians and John, we are again to receive encouragement and an insight into the accountability we as Christian Disciples accept.

Paul hoped his letter would lead to healed divisions and reestablished unity so that the Corinthians would more fully manifest Christ in their life and witness. Paul reminded the Corinthians that unity must spring from their common theological *identity* as people in Christ. United to Christ, Christians are united to one another, which means that that qualitative distinctions among people have no place in Christian community. Paul is saying that the "one and the same" Holy Spirit gives gifts that equip Christians for various yet complementary ministries. The Spirit's work is cohesive, uniting believers into "one body" comprising members that function interdependently. Christian community, worship, and ministry--if they are to reflect the fullness of God's Spirit--must manifest unified diversity. Diverse gifts and insights that proclaim Jesus and sustain his body must be valued. When people formulate hierarchies among themselves or impose distinctions based upon appraisals of gifts, they fail to reflect the Spirit's identity and threaten to obstruct the Spirit's work in their corporate existence. How do we, as Christ's hands and feet, respect the diversity among Christ's people and work together for the Kingdom of God?

It is interesting too, that as we navigate through these unfamiliar times, our Gospel reading begins with the disciples being gathered behind a locked door. As our Bishop said in his Easter message, "the church has left the building." It may not be gathering within the confines of a familiar room, but the Church is ever-present, even in these happenings. We continue to share the connections individually within our own hearts. Hymn writer Brian Foley writes these words: Holy Spirit, come, confirm us in the truth that Christ makes known: we have faith and understanding though your helping gifts alone." (No. 331, UMH) When things are not going as we think they should, we too cower behind locked door. Jesus understands this fear and no amount of door locking on our part will keep him from being present to us. Jesus calls his disciples into mission and we too are to the Good News in our own place and time. Jesus came to the disciples at the time of their great fear. He came to them although the doors were locked.

So be it . . .

Prayer

O God, on this day you open the hearts of your faithful people by sending into us your Holy Spirit. Direct us by the light of that Spirit, that we may have a right judgment in all things and rejoice at all times in your peace, through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

