

Worship for May 28, 2023  
Pentecost

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship Joel 1, 2

The Word of the Lord to the prophet:

**I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all flesh;**

**Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your old shall dream dreams, and your young shall see visions.**

Prayer of the Day Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894

**As the wind is your symbol, so forward our goings.**

**As the dove, so launch us heavenward.**

**As water, so purify our hearts.**

**As a cloud, so abate our temptations.**

**As dew, so revive our languor.**

**As fire, purge out our dross. Amen.**

\*Hymn 291 Spirit, verses 1 and 2

Prayer of Confession

**Almighty God, you poured out your Spirit upon the gathered disciples,  
creating bold tongues, open ears, and a new community of faith.**

**We confess that we hold back the force of your Spirit among us.**

**We do not listen for your word of grace,**

**speak the good news of your love,**

**or live as a people made one in Christ.**

**Have mercy on us, O God.**

**Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit,**

**and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people,**

**doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

\*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me as I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The Lord separates us from our sins as far as the east is from the west.

Know you are forgiven and freed to live in peace, to testify to the saving love of God through

Jesus Christ, and are empowered by the indwelling Spirit. Amen.

## Time With Our Young Disciples

Reading from Scripture Acts 2:1-8, 11b-21

### Morning Message

It was a beautiful July day at Cooper's Rock State Forest near Morgantown. The loud, fierce storm that had blown thru the night before had left the world a bright, fresh green.

Wedding guests had assembled...as many as could be seated under the roof of the picnic shelter. The music had begun...there's nothing more lovely to a West Virginian than the sound of stringed instruments against a backdrop of majestic mountains and sweet summer air.

Nothing lovelier except the bride, my daughter. In antique white lace, an exquisite veil falling from the crown of her head, over her shoulders, gently blowing in the breeze.

Prayers, promises, rings, and the moment for which all the little cousins waited...the kiss...and the wedding party made their way of out of the shelter to pose for a few quick pictures before joining the guests. Perfect. This was the second time I was officiating clergy and mother of the bride and I was feeling a great sense of relief. I was looking forward to the cake and champagne.

And then we heard the groom's father shout, "Dad!" And then the groom shout, "Papaw!" We all turned to see a woman in a green taffeta dress streak across the shelter, hurdling benches. She started slapping the head of an elderly man with the crowd rising to their feet, some running toward the commotion and others making room for help to move in, the gentle strains of guitar and violin drowned out by gasps of guests and cries of family members.

And then we saw it...the plume of smoke...and it seemed to be coming from Papaw. On his way out of the picnic shelter, he had tripped on the stone floor and stumbled into the unity candle, catching his hair on fire! My sister, Amy, was the one smacking him on the head in an effort to put out the flame. She was successful and no permanent damage was done, though it gave us all a fright.

Later, trying to elicit a smile from me, my husband observed that we had re-enacted the Pentecost event as described in the book of Acts. A crowd gathered from the four corners of the country, a service of worship, lots of conversation in all kinds of dialects, and flames dancing over the head of at least one person. I wasn't amused and only stopped shaking sometime in the middle of the next week.

Pentecost, Shavout, in Hebrew, is a Jewish festival held on the fiftieth day after Passover, to celebrate the spring fruits. Later, it was expanded to include the arrival of the Hebrew people

from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, and the gift of Torah. At the time of the event described in the text, devout Jews were obligated to assemble each year in Jerusalem in celebration of both Passover and Shavout.

In our text, we find Jesus' disciples and other followers gathered in the upper room on that day. In addition to the obligation to assemble in Jerusalem for this festival, the disciples were following the explicit instructions given by Jesus to remain there until that time when they are baptized by the Holy Spirit and empowered to take the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth.

So on that day they were waiting. And suddenly from heaven came the noise and the wind and the fire, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Pilgrims from every nation were gathered in Jerusalem that day and they were drawn to the site of all this commotion, amazed, because they were hearing about God's mighty acts of power each in their own language, in a way they could understand.

What was this language? Was it the kind we speak, with subjects and predicates, verbs that can be conjugated, and participles threatening to dangle? Or was it the phenomenon of ecstatic language, glossalalia, described as a gift of the Holy Spirit?

I can't answer that. But one of my go-to scholarly sources, Dr. Bob Newman, offers this helpful information: "God's Holy Spirit does not eliminate cultural differences from his *modus operandi*, but on the contrary, moves in and inhabits cultural differences, co-ops them, in this case different languages, so that these cultural differences become working instruments, tools valuable and necessary in order to make witness real and true. It is worth remembering that the Hebrew Torah insists one time that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," while there are many, perhaps innumerable, examples throughout the Hebrew canon which insist upon love for the alien, or the stranger whom you may encounter."

It is about the importance of language, a valuable and necessary tool, that can make witness real and true, that I want to lift up today.

Here's why: I recently sat with a session engaged in a pastoral search. We talked about what initially attracted them to the church and what might be said to a newcomer about what they find meaningful there. I saw a look of pain cross the face of one of the members. His grief and concern were evident as he shared his observation that there is a palpable sense of depression in the community, and in the wider world, but people aren't turning to the church for help, for fellowship, guidance or support. This church member asked the question we should all ask:

“Where do people find help, where do they find meaning for their lives? We find it in a relationship with Jesus Christ, but have we lost our ability to bear witness to Christ’s message in such a way as the family of faith expands?”

As I drove away, I recalled a sermon I once heard given by Rev. Dr. James Forbes. Before he retired, Forbes was the Senior Minister of the famed Riverside Church in New York City. I have been blessed to hear him preach from that pulpit. His reputation is that of a strong progressive voice for the mainline Church and social justice issues in particular.

Briefly, the sermon I remembered was titled “Are All the Children In?” Forbes grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, one of eight children in a Christian home. When the family would gather around the table each night for supper, before anyone prayed over the meal or took even a bite of food, his mother would look around the table and ask, “Are all the children in?” And if someone was missing, they set about fixing a plate so that the one absent would have something to eat when he or she did arrive.

He says this simple question has served as a guide to his life and ministry over the years, especially when working through areas of conflict. Many conflicts erupt in the church about who’s in and who’s out, who’s worthy to be a member, or an ordained officer. That little question had served to clarify many issues that arose in church life.

When he asked himself if this sort of radical hospitality would advance the kingdom, the answer was always yes. God made us for God’s self and calls all of us to the table.

That was not an easy sell. Ever. But when he applied himself to listening, really listening to the various concerns, he heard the language of fear. Once the language was identified, he could work on that, and in time, through love and grace and lots of reassurance, folks would come around. He says, quite honestly, he could relate to their fears, because he had once had them, too. But, as scripture tells us, perfect love casts out fear. We may not be perfect but Jesus is and he will show us the way.

Friends, I don’t have to tell you the church has changed. We simply can’t do church the way we did it fifty years ago, or even two years ago. But, our call is still the same: to be Christ’s witnesses to the ends of the earth. We Presbyterians do that thru works of justice, kindness and mercy.

In practical terms, what does that mean?

It means that when we gather for worship, or summer camp or circle meeting or session, or a work project, or any other time or place we may assemble in order to bear witness to our faith, the question that rises from our lips should be, “Are all the children in?”

My husband and I visited a church for a wedding once. There was a sign hanging in the entryway of the church that read: “These things are not allowed in God’s house:  
Women in pants, make-up, jewelry, drinkers or smokers.”

Something told us they were deadly serious about these prohibitions, though we knew God had bigger problems to solve.

It’s been forty years since we saw that sign, and I still don’t think those things are what offends God. I believe what offends God is for his people to intentionally welcome some people and reject others.

I want to be part of the church that welcomes everyone without applying a litmus test. I made that speech many times and it sounded pretty good until I was directly questioned about it.

Not long ago, I sat in my doctor’s office. It was the day after Easter and he wanted to share some of the ways his church had observed Holy Week. He is a Christian and he enjoys talking about his faith. Then he looked right at me and asked if my church allowed gay Christians to participate in worship and church activities. There was a gay man in their church choir and the pastor had told him that he was not permitted to sing in the choir any longer. This troubled him.

He asked some other very pointed questions that I don’t feel comfortable sharing here, but, were important in that moment.

Before responding, I sent up an emergency prayer, “Help!”

And I said, “When a person walks through our doors, I am their pastor. Just as when a patient walks into your office, you are his or her doctor. They are entrusting themselves to your care and you seek to serve them to the best of your ability. Same with me.”

Friends, the divisions in our society are many. They are like fault lines about to open up and swallow us whole. Everyone is shouting at once: neighbors, families, politicians, some pastors. We are grieving a multitude of losses. Following closely on the heels of grief is anger. And we can’t or won’t understand each other while we are angry.

How different could this world be, how different could this year be, if we would pause at the end of our day and just ask, in whatever sphere of influence or belonging in which you dwell, “Are

all the children in?" Is everyone being cared for? Do they have a safe home, adequate food? Are they lonely? Do they have human interaction/

Consider our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. So many will be forever broken as they look around their tables. Never again will all their children be in this side of heaven.

Consider the families in Uvalde, Texas, suffering from the terrible violence that was unleashed on Robb Elementary School. Longing to gather their children in their arms once more and knowing that will never happen.

And then there are our adult children. Are they in? The ones who have been rejected by their pastors or their parents?

I don't have the answer for ending violence or resolving international or even family conflict. But, I have confidence that the same fire and wind that birthed the Church can empower us today to bring healing and wholeness to our community and beyond.

We can find a common language. Let's start with love. We all need and want love. We can find common goals. We all want to live. We want our children and their children to live long and prosper.

But, we won't live long and we won't prosper unless and until we make this question a part of our every day: "Are all the children in?"

\* Hymn 291 Spirit, verses 3 and 4

\*Affirmation of Faith From *A Brief Statement of Faith*, p. 38, section 4

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Celebrating the Sacrament of Communion

Invitation Words of Institution Great Prayer of Thanksgiving Distribution of the Elements

Prayer After Communion

**Loving God, you have fed and blessed us in this sacrament,  
united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.**

**Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work to your praise and glory.**

**For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithe and Offering

Offertory

\*Hymn 606 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Hymn 338 America the Beautiful

Congregational Meeting

\*Blessing

Women: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.

Men: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.

Leader: Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us.

All: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.

\*Postlude