



# Pentecost Sunday

May 23, 2021

\* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude

## Gathering

Welcome and Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unit us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

\* Call to Worship

Liturgist: Lord, all people look to you –

**All:**  
**When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.**  
**When you hide your face, they are terrified.**  
**When you take away their breath, they return to the dust.**  
**When you send your Spirit, they are created and renewed.**

Liturgist: Send your Spirit, O Lord.  
Pour out your Spirit on all peoples.  
here, even now, may your Spirit create a new thing.

**All:**  
**We will sing to the Lord all our lives**  
**We will sing praise to our God for as long as we have breath.**  
**We will rejoice and praise the Lord.**

Liturgist: Spirit of God, fall afresh on us.

*Psalm 104:24-34 adapted*

**All Singing:** **529 “Gather Us In”**  
*Singing verses 1, 2, and 3*

God's Greeting  
God's People Greeting One Another

**All Singing: 246 "God is Here"**

Children's Blessing

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

**All: And also, with you.**

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from sin and death.

**All: For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.**

Liturgist: And so, he condemned sin in human flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

*Romans 8:1-4 adapted*

*Silent Confession and Reflection*

Liturgist: Sisters and brothers, Christ is in you, even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

**All: For those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. The Spirit we have received does not make us slaves, so that we live in fear; rather, the Spirit we have received has brought about our adoption to be the sons and daughters of God the Father.**

*Romans 8:14-15 adapted*

\* **All Singing: 833 "There is a Redeemer"**

## Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

**All: Lord of heaven and earth, pour out on us the abundant gifts of your Holy Spirit. May the work begun by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost continue in us as we hear your Word and gather at your table. Amen.**

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: What We've Got

\* **All Singing: 746 "Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God"**

Institution

Thanksgiving  
Invitation  
Communion

Acclamation  
\* **All Singing: 957 “Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises”**

## Dedication

Prayers of the People

## Sending

\* Benediction

\* **All Singing: 959 “Glory Be to the Father”**

Postlude: “To God be the Glory”

arr. John Innes

### Worship Leaders

Pianist / Vocalist:

Erin Pacheco

Acolyte:

Cora Varghese

Pianist / Flutist:

Lynn Hollender

Liturgist:

Melissa Varghese

Guitar:

Moises Pacheco

Prayer:

Mark Friesen

Tenor Sax:

Aaron Murawski

Djembe:

Paul Mulchrone

Sound / Video:

Schuyler Roozeboom

Minister:

Roger Nelson

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)  
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Text: Acts 2: 1-21  
Title: What We've Got  
Date: 05.23.21  
Roger Allen Nelson

The pastor of a healthy-mid-sized-east-coast-reformed-church lifted his hands, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know what we've got."

After navigating presidential politics, the pandemic, and a year of on-line worship, he said he didn't know who was in and who was out. He didn't know who was coming back and who had moved on. As the denomination was fracturing over how best to love LGBT folks, as the habit of gathered-weekly-worship had been broken, and as people were "languishing" (sort of weary and stuck in place) he confessed that he didn't know what was left. "I don't know what we've got."

He's not alone.

Barna Research recently reported that 30% of Protestant pastors have given "real, serious consideration" to quitting the pastorate in the last year. Barna describes the last year as a "crucible" wherein churches were frayed and fragmented by political and social divides at a time when "people's connectedness to local congregations was waning. The pandemic was a great revealer of the challenges churches face."

Or, there's the results of a Gallup poll indicating that religious membership in the United States has fallen to less than half of the adult population for the first time since Gallup began asking the question more than 80 years ago. And you don't want to look too closely at the trend trajectory....

"I don't know what we've got."

The pastor of a black congregation, while reflecting on funerals, told me that he could no longer count on folks knowing a certain funeral protocol. Their parents or grandparents came up from the south bringing with them a deep rooting in the church and when you did a funeral you could count on shared practices of prayer, familiar gospel music, and a common cultural currency. Those roots are now weak and withered. What was passed down is being lost.

"I don't know what we've got."

I get all that.

I know a measure of angst and anxiety about Hope. It feels fragile. I don't know who's still with us and who's moved on. Pandemic politics takes a toll. I miss families, children, and old saints that we haven't seen in months. We've buried too many and sent too many to west Michigan. The CRC is on the cusp of a conversation about human sexuality that has only shredded and split other denominations. After 19 years my preaching voice seems stale....

"I don't know what we've got."

But, dear friends, rather than question what don't have, can we consider what we do?  
Rather than worry about what we don't got, can we ask what we do got?  
Rather than wringing our hands is there something to raise in celebration?

Our text is helpful because the disciples were in a similar place.

They'd followed Jesus with great hope, only to see him crucified. He subsequently appeared to them in some resurrected form, but then was gone again. He told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, but they weren't sure what that meant. It all felt fragile and uncertain, so they were huddled together waiting, wondering, worrying. They didn't know what else to do. They didn't know what they had.

And then the wind blew. With the sound of a raucous tornado, fire splintered into tongues that leapt and licked over the disciples' heads as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This was not a cool drink and a gentle breeze; this was a stiff-enough-shot-of-courage that bystanders thought they were drunk. And...

fifty days after the resurrection,  
ten days after the ascension,  
on a Jewish holiday,  
the disciples went from waiting and wondering to proclaiming the wonders of God. They went from huddling in fear and uncertainty to being vessels that held the Spirit of God.

There are other stories in scripture where God gives his Spirit, but this story is crucial because the gift dramatically changes the disciples' behavior. Everything changes because one day the Holy Spirit blew in a new and powerful way.

Brothers and sisters, we've been given the gift of the Holy Spirit.  
The very Spirit of God is inside of and among us.

What have we got?  
We've got the Spirit.

Yes. There's good reason to worry. The institutions that have ordered our lives are in distress. Denominations are in decline, more churches close than open, and Christian schools and colleges are working hard to figure out new ways to be viable, culturally engaged, and faithful. The landscape is changing. The glue that holds us together is stretched. Lots of things will change or come tumbling down, but.... but the Spirit will continue to blow.

Historically the church has weathered worse and yet still rose up from the rubble and ash because the Spirit is never extinguished. So, our hope is not in what we've built, our hope is not in institutions or even great traditions, our hope is in the Spirit. For as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

*(the Holy Spirit) makes me share in Christ and all his blessings, comforts me, and remains with me forever....*

What have we got?  
We've got the Spirit.  
And we've got each other....

It's worth noting that Pentecost is communal.

The disciples are together; the crowd that gathers is part of a religious community that has come to Jerusalem for a religious practice; and the gift of the Spirit is not imparted to individuals as part of a personal relationship with God but to a community, to men and women who are in relationship with one another.

The list in our text of Parthians to Egyptians and visitors from Rome is not a random list. With Jerusalem as the hub of the wheel, the list stretches out in all directions, like spokes. Luke (the author) lists the people and places of the farthest reaches of the world. So, at this very first breath of the church, Luke is blowing in a hint that this activity of God has reaches to all nations.

However, the twist here is not that everyone speaks the same language but that the gospel is proclaimed in all languages. We tend to think of Pentecost as the tower of Babel turned-upside-down – the curse is reversed and there is some new unity of culture – but the text reads that those gathered in Jerusalem are stupefied because they hear their own languages being spoken.

They are no less Syrian or Pamphylian.

They are no less Cretans or Arabs.

They are not united in a mono-culture.

They are their own distinct selves, with their own languages, cultures, and gifts.

And yet the gospel reaches them all.

What do we have?  
We have each other.

And that means that we're not alone but we're part of a relational web that is multi-cultural and diverse and complex and colorful and dynamic and global and, and, and....

And, therefore, conflict will always be part of our experience. The rich gift of community comes with conflict embedded. That's a difficult reality for one who's "conflict avoidant," but just as community was given with the first breath of the church so too conflict followed.

Maybe the prompting of Pentecost is not to lose one another in conflict but to hold tight even when we disagree. Maybe our calling is to embody forgiveness and reconciliation and unity – even in conflict. It seems a gift of the Spirit.

What have we got?  
We've got the Spirit, we've got each other....  
And, we've got three-point sermon....

I've got a playlist for my funeral. I hope it years before we play it, but I've picked out songs by Springsteen, Jason Isbell, and a live version of "Brothers in Arms" by Mark Knopfler. Each song has a place and a purpose. I'd also like Erin Pacheco to sing "Give Me Jesus." (She knows this.) Years ago, she sang it at a funeral. It took my breath away. It stuck with me.

It's probably schmaltzy and lacks musical or theological sophistication, but for me it cuts to heart of it all. In living and dying, in body and soul, at first breath and in the dark of night, whatever befalls, give me Jesus....

Dear friends, the Pentecost wind is preamble to proclamation of Jesus. All of that wind blows toward Jesus. What the Spirit does is point toward Jesus. What the Spirit does is give us Jesus. As N.T. Wright writes:

*God doesn't give people the Holy Spirit in order to let them enjoy the spiritual equivalent of a day at the shore. Of course, if you're downcast and gloomy, the fresh wind of God's Spirit can and often does give you a new perspective on everything and, above all, a sense of God's presence, love, comfort and even joy. But the point of the Spirit is to enable those who follow Jesus to take into all the world the news that he is Lord, that he has won the victory over the forces of evil, that a new world has opened up and that we are to help make it happen.*

Wherever you are this morning,  
whatever has you wringing your hands,  
whatever clouds are on the horizon,  
whatever overwhelms,  
whatever makes you shrug your shoulders, "I don't know what we've got."

Be encouraged that the very Spirit of God is with you, you are not alone (you've been given to one another), and you've got Jesus. And while all that may seem too trite, and it doesn't mean that there won't be troubles, I don't know what I'd rather have. Do you?

Thanks be to God.  
Amen.