



Pastor Gwen's Pentecost Message *Sunday, May 31, 2020*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Well, today is the Day of Pentecost. What does that mean to you? Perhaps your memory holds a picture of a birthday party for the church complete with cake and candles. Possibly when you think of Pentecost, you visualize little tongues of fire sitting on the disciples' shoulders. Or maybe Pentecost creates in you a vision of a dove floating down from heaven to rest on Jesus as he comes out of the baptismal waters of the Jordan.

Well, the Day of Pentecost started as the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament that was required by Jewish law. It was a feast of the harvest and the day of the first fruits. But, the actual word Pentecost is found only in the New Testament and in the Apocrypha. In the New Testament it is found in Acts 2:1 which begins our reading for today and then again in Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8. In the Apocrypha the word Pentecost, which means five or fifty, is found in Tobit and 2nd Maccabees. Pentecost is commonly thought to follow Passover by fifty days. However, that was not a sure thing as it depended on when the harvest occurred, and the grain was ripe.

The first Christian Pentecost is deeply rooted in the Gospel of Luke. In this Gospel we hear the words to Mary "The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Luke 1:35. The Spirit responsible for the birth of Jesus is also responsible for the birth of the church. Jesus told the disciples, "wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high." His disciples are filled with the same Spirit that descended upon him at his baptism. Jesus began his ministry "Spirit-filled" and so does the church.

In our Acts reading for today we hear about the disciples that, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." This was a gift of the Spirit so that all would be prepared to go out to speak the language of the people they encountered; being able to communicate of God's deeds of power to all

nations. It was not a party where the disciples were filled with new wine, even though those tongues of fire appeared among them. It was the Holy Spirit coming to them giving them the ability to tell the story of God's amazing love to all people.

The Holy Spirit that came to the disciples on the day of Pentecost was given to them so that they could continue Jesus' mission of reconciling the world to God. This is the same Spirit that comes to us today and empowers and charges us to speak and act in Jesus' name. We are called to witness to God's love and charged with inviting others to join us in celebrating all that God has done for us. This gift of the Holy Spirit should not be taken lightly. The Spirit gives us new life and changes us in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Sit back for a minute, close your eyes and let's listen again to Luke. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

Can you see those tongues of fire on the shoulders of the disciples? They set the souls of the disciples on fire with passion for sharing the Good News of Jesus. What power the Holy Spirit has! What energy.

Shift your thoughts, with me for a few minutes about something we are very familiar with, electricity. Most of us grew up in a time when we already had taken electricity for granted. You walk into a room and flick a switch and the lights go on. How powerful is that?

I remember in middle school doing an experiment for the science fair with a light bulb to demonstrate how electricity works. It helped to have an electrical engineer for a father. It had a simple light bulb, a battery and a switch. When the circuit was completed, then of course the light bulb would light up. After writing a report about what that project was showing, I certainly gained a healthy respect for electricity.

Electricity is conductive. When the current gets generated it flows out in every direction bringing with it power to everything it touches.

The Holy Spirit as well has this conductive property. We are by God's grace filled with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is then passed on to our friends, relatives and neighbors as we share the spark of God's grace.

Electricity is also versatile. Think about how many things in our homes run on electricity. From your appliances to our computers. If the power goes out during a storm, our lives are darkened. In our house that means Rodney needs to go out and start the generator to

get lights, heat and the well pump working again. It is our alternate supply of electricity. Electricity is at the heart of so much of what we do and we urn to have it back again. Actually, our basement sump pump is the priority during a good storm, so our basement does not get flooded. Electricity is important to so many facets of our lives.

And so too is the Holy Spirit important. Paul in 1 Corinthians says, "Now there are a varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit and there are varieties of services but the same Lord and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." The Holy Spirit of God is pointing us in different directions, to do different vocations, to inspire us to different ministries but all for the glory of God. Just like electricity in our homes makes possible life with so many inventions and gadgets, giving us time to relax and enjoy life and do other things.

Think about Christmas tree lights. Electricity now powers them, unlike in Luther's time when candles were used to light trees. I remember each Christmas my dad would get boxes of lights down out of the attic and try to get them working. Finally, one year, he threw them all in the garbage and went to the store and bought new lights. The old fashioned and cheap lights were strung in series. So, when one went out, they all go out. Remember that. Yup, you could sit for hours trying bulb after bulb to see which one was bad and then if you replaced it, they all would light up. Ah, but if two were bad, that made the chore unbearable unless you had a little contraption to check the lights. I can hear you smiling! Well, Dad went and bought lights that were in a parallel circuit. They were wired separately so if one goes out it does not affect the other lights. These lights strands were a bit more expensive at the time, but sure saved agony for the user.

So now imagine which set of lights would describe the Holy Spirit? If His light goes out in one person does the Spirit still shine brightly in those around him? Or if one person is struggling with his or her faith, does the faith of everyone become questionable? Well, I would like to think that the Holy Spirit's work is parallel, going to everyone and not subject to the effect of just one person. Yet, everyone can have some influence on helping another in his or her faith journey. Ummmm.

Another thing about electricity is that it is carried from house to house. Wires carry power to my house and then on to my neighbor. What I don't use of it, (resistance?) is still there for the neighbor. There always seems to be plenty to go around. Not true in all places in the world, but for now go with me on this one. The Holy Spirit is present in the lives of all the baptized whether they choose to turn it on or not. His care and concern for all people is the same, unending and eternal.

And electricity is also very shocking. Have you ever gotten a shock from electricity? It can be quite jolting. At least you must have had a shock from friction, what do they call that? Right, static electricity. So, if you touch someone who is electrically charged you will get shocked. Just slide your foot across the carpet and then go and touch something or

someone and you can give them a shock. Actually, you both feel the spark, interesting? And we all have seen the dangers of power lines down in a storm. Wiggling around with a spark at the end. No one wants to get in the way of this danger.

Yes, electricity once unleashed is powerful. High voltage energy I imagine is like the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples on that day of Pentecost. There was no holding back those flames of fire. They were there on the disciples in full force. The Holy Spirit came to them all.

The Spirit is nothing less than power from on high and once it gets hold of us individually or as a congregation, we will never be the same. A fire will continue to burn within us seeking the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit brings to all believers many gifts, all to be used to further the important story of God's love for his precious children. So, Beware: The Spirit gives to you an electricity that will shake the foundation of your life. Do not be afraid of the High Voltage, but rather embrace the Spirit of God sharing it with your neighbor. And together live into the new life that God is calling you to live. **AMEN**