

It's A New Day!
Pentecost Sunday
May 23, 2021
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This is a day of new beginnings.

For some of you, this may be the first time you have been back here in worship in over a year!

For little Parker, the first Rhinehart to be baptized here since his father was, I think, it is a new beginning, as he is washed and accepted into the Church and family of God.

For Aidan, Sophie, and Will, it is the beginning of their life as members of the congregation, with all the rights and privileges that pertain thereunto!

It is always a day of new beginnings.

What must it have been like for those early disciples, the first ones, in Jerusalem? They had been scared, hiding, afraid for their lives, and then – in a moment, the Spirit of God comes down and dances among them like flames of fire. All of their hesitation, their reticence, their fear, has been burned away. They are left rejoicing in the confidence of God's presence among them.

By the way, if you go online to YouTube and search for the "holy fire" you can see something like this! Every year at midnight on Easter, the Orthodox bishop of Jerusalem takes an unlit candle into the empty tomb, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and it lights on fire by itself. The flame then jumps from his candle to other candles; it is a flame that doesn't burn. You can see the joy on people's faces as they play with it. I am not saying you need to believe this, but it happens every year.

The Spirit comes as fire. The Spirit comes as a mighty wind. An ancient prayer says, "come as the fire and burn, come as the wind and cleanse." You know, when we lived in Indiana, we had lots of wind in the winter. And we had these snow squalls – sometimes the snow would be like little balls, like Styrofoam, and the wind would sweep it right off the sidewalks! I liked that wind.

Pentecost is a Greek word that means fifty. It marks fifty days since Easter. In ancient Judaism, there was the Passover feast, and fifty days later, the Feast of Weeks, or, Shavuot. That feast celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses. So, fifty days after the Passover, Jews celebrate getting the Law from God. And fifty days after Easter, Christians celebrate the coming of the Spirit to the Church. This is sometimes known as the "birthday of the Church," but it is more than that. The parallels with what came before are striking. The pattern of the Jewish festivals anticipates and foreshadows the coming of Jesus in so many ways. This is why St. Paul can claim that the Law is good, while comparing it to the coming of the Spirit, a comparison lost on us because we come after Martin Luther's wretched misreading of these things.

So the Spirit comes as fire and wind. The Spirit comes and gives us confidence. It gives us joy. It takes away what clutters our lives. It points us to the one thing that matters: Jesus Christ.

What happens on that first day? The disciples preach! And they preach in all these languages! Now, some believe they simply preached, but the hearers, from all over the world, heard the preaching but heard it in their native languages. Others believe the disciples actually spoke in these languages that they didn't know. I don't know how much difference it makes. Either way, it is a miracle, done by the Spirit. Either way, we see the power of God, and we see the gospel proclaimed to all these people who will take it back home with them, to places all around the known world. Scoffers say, "ah, these men are drunk!" But Peter gets up and says, "It's only nine o'clock in the morning. They are not drunk." And then he goes ahead and preaches, showing what this is from the Hebrew scriptures. This outpouring of the Spirit is what Joel talked about. The Spirit comes and brings life to what is old and dead.

And so it is with us. The Spirit comes and brings life. The Spirit says, this is a new day! Let's get up and rejoice! God has made this day for us. God wants us to rejoice and be glad all the day long.

We structure our lives in ways that make things easy and convenient. Those structures, the daily rituals we have, have power, because they give life an order. We know what is going to happen next. It is similar with the rituals of the Church. We know what is going to happen because we have done it before. Some think, well the Church's life is boring, because we always do the same things. Those people are mistaken, I believe. The ritual is what makes it come alive. We can trust the Spirit to come, precisely because we don't have to have our noses buried in the prayer books. We already know what is coming. We know the words. Similarly, the rituals that spread over time give meaning to the rest of that time. We know we live in a post-resurrection world. We know the Spirit has come. We mark the time that passes by these rituals and festivals.

And for these confirmands, they are coming into this life in a new way. They are confirming publicly the promises made for them in baptism. They will see the Spirit in a new way after today. They will feel the Spirit burning in their hearts, and know the power of God in new and exciting ways.

The little boy we will baptize will find himself, as he grows, a part of this community of faith, a part of it that carries on its traditions, and keeps it alive. Faith is more than an individual thing; it is the confession of the community. Whenever we say the Creed, we recognize that we are a part of a long tradition of faithful people who have believed what we believe.

As we gather around the Lord's Table today, we will be nurtured, fed, as it were, with the grace that comes by the spirit of God to us. And that will strengthen us not only for the week, but will make us stronger in the grace of God for the challenges that come our way. Together we will be able to stand up and fearlessly make our proclamation, because of the Table.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!
 Come as the wind and cleanse!
 Come as the fire and burn!
 Come as the light and reveal!
 Convict us, convert us, consecrate us, until we are wholly thine!
 Come, Holy Spirit!

And let us come! Thanks be to God! Amen.