

Pentecost for Extraverts and Introverts  
Acts 2:1-4; John 20:19-23  
May 28, 2023 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC  
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Well, happy birthday, Saints! Today is the birthday of the Church – the day the Holy Spirit came to turn this ragtag group of very human, very confused followers of Jesus, the crucified, the Risen Lord, into the very Body of Christ on Earth. This is a huge moment. As Luke frames it for us in the Book of Acts, the second coming of Christ has already happened, and we are it. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we actually become Christ's earthly presence. That's a daunting job description, don't you think?

It is an unlikely and exciting story. The disciples are sitting together, praying, waiting, day after day. No television. No smart phones. Just prayer and hymns and waiting. Then, suddenly the sound of a rushing wind fills the house, and tongues of fire appear above their heads, and they all begin to speak unfamiliar languages – each one a different language from the others. The Holy Spirit has arrived on the scene, as Jesus had promised.

Filled with the Spirit, the disciples all rush out into the street. This is Jerusalem, the big city, with people from all over the world, shopping, conducting business. The Bible says there were Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome. And into this sophisticated, world-travelling crowd come the disciples, shouting in all different languages about God's love saving the world, and about a savior who has risen from the dead, and the preachers all have fire dancing on their heads! What a way to launch the church.

Let's see if we can replicate what that might have sounded like. In your bulletins you each have an insert. Raise your hand if your insert says "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites." Let's practice that together: Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. Okay, who has Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia? Let's practice together: Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia. Last group – this is the fun one – who has Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome? Can you say that together? Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome.

Let's try group 1 again – Parthians, Medes, and Elamites.  
Group 2 – Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia  
Group 3 – Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome

Now we're going to do it all together. Group 1, yours is shorter, so just keep going. Groups 2 and 3, say yours three times through. Let's see what we sound like together! Go!

Friends, that is what Pentecost sounded like, according to the Book of Acts. The birthday of the Church, a wild cacophony, shouted to the world that had come to the big city of Jerusalem that day. It was an extravert's idea of a great party, don't you think? How many people can we talk to this morning? Who can we meet today? And all fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I don't know about all of you. I am not an extravert. I am an introvert. I love people, and I enjoy getting to know people quietly, in ones and twos, learning their stories and sharing my own. I am comfortable talking about the love and power of God in small groups, even from the pulpit of a smallish church. But this Pentecost story makes me tired, and – as exciting as it is – it doesn't feel like a story that includes me.

Which is why I am so glad to tell you that there is a second Pentecost story, a very different one, in the Gospel of John. It is called the Insufflation, or the Little Pentecost. The Gospel of John tells us that on Easter evening, the evening after the resurrection, the disciples, fearful, were in a locked room. And Jesus came and appeared among them. He said, "Peace be with you." And he showed them his wounds. They recognized him and rejoiced. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you. As my Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on each of them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

I like this Pentecost story so much better. It fits me better. It is quieter. It is personal. Jesus looks each disciple in the eye and says, "Peace." Then he breathes the Spirit into each one of them individually. I love that image. In Luke's version, the Holy Spirit is a roaring wind, full of fire and power. In John's version, the Spirit is a breath, filled with peace. John calls it the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter.

Which is your Pentecost story? Which one inspires you? Which one fills you with the Holy Spirit? Which one invites you to a transformed life? However the Spirit comes to each of us, and to this church, we need to remember that both Pentecost stories come with a charge. In Luke's version, the Holy Spirit is so powerful that the little, closeted, house church bursts out into the world, testifying to the risen Lord, and sometimes being persecuted for it. In John's version, Jesus sends his newly inspired disciples out into the world to forgive the people they meet. Whichever way we receive the Holy Spirit, we don't just get to receive the Spirit and keep it to ourselves.

The Spirit comes to each of us as we need to receive it. It may blast through our lives, changing everything in a moment, or it may simply breathe itself into us and literally inspire us toward something new. But always, always the Spirit calls us to new ways of sharing God's love.

So, happy birthday, Saints! We are the Body of Christ here on Earth. That is a daunting job description, but we are ready. Because the Spirit of Power, the Spirit of Truth, the very breath of God, is calling us out into the world to love people in God's name!

Amen