

05.19.24 ~ Day of Pentecost
“Holy Terror or Holy Wonder?”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Acts 2:1-13 (The Message)

¹⁻⁴ When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

⁵⁻¹¹ There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were blown away. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, “Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?”

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;
Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,
Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;
Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;
Even Cretans and Arabs!

“They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!”

¹² Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: “What's going on here?”

¹³ Others joked, “They're drunk on cheap wine.”

Leader: These Words Tell of God's Mighty Works!
All: Thanks be to God!

Acts 2:14-16, 38-41 (The Message)

¹⁴⁻²¹ That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: “Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

“In the Last Days,” God says,
“I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.

When the time comes,
 I'll pour out my Spirit
 On those who serve me, men and women both,
 and they'll prophesy.
 I'll set wonders in the sky above
 and signs on the earth below,
 Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
 the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
 Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
 the Day tremendous and marvelous;
 And whoever calls out for help
 to me, God, will be saved."

³⁸⁻³⁹ Peter said, "Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are far away—whomever, in fact, our Master God invites."

⁴⁰ He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, "Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!"

⁴¹⁻⁴² That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

Leader: These Words of Invitation Are from God!

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Almighty God, we thank you for the amazing power and wonder of this day called Pentecost. We seek your power in our lives; we come here each week to be refueled by your Holy Spirit to go into the world to serve and to share how our faith in Jesus has changed us and can save others. Help us to walk in the shoes of these disciples who experienced the awesome wonder that day. Help us Lord to open our hearts and minds to the mysterious life-giving power that you not only promised in Christ, but that you sacrificially gave and fulfilled in him. May the Holy Spirit fall on us today and always as we strive to do your will. We still rejoice at the resurrection and your shared spirit through these scriptures; may your invitation be heard today through this messenger. Amen.

Happy Pentecost Sunday! Thank you for wearing red and thank you to our vocal ensemble and instrumentalists for your gifts and talents used to glorify God. We had another group in the church that wore red, called Sopranessence. Thank you to those who came to the benefit concert

yesterday and supported this group and The Arc of Northern Virginia. They represent and serve more than 39,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) with direct service programs, education, and advocacy over their lifetimes. The music selections were uplifting and inspirational tunes from musical theater, and appropriate lyrics for those going through challenging times. Several families and clients were present.

Today begins the liturgical church season between the Day of Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter, through the first Sunday of Advent; it is called Ordinary Time. For the church calendar, the Day of Pentecost is the day when 120 disciples were gathered “at home” or in one place in Jerusalem, and the spirit of the Lord descended like a dove on them. Although the witnessing Jews knew that these affected were all Galileans, the disciples spoke in different languages from their birth towns yet could understand one another! The diversity of the culture makes this an amazing feat, made the Jews skeptical, and even perplexed those present who experienced the miracle.

Before they saw the dove, there was a thundering sound, like a rushing wind. It filled the house and was terrifying at first. Have you ever weathered a hurricane or tornado? I imagine it sounded like that – the intense winds, groaning of buildings, roaring like an approaching freight train, all creating a flight response in the brain. Having so many languages being spoken all at the same time must have felt chaotic to those present. If you look at the Italian Renaissance painting by Titian on the front cover of our bulletin, you can see the terror in the expressions of the people. The Message translation is somewhat different than other

translations and does not identify tongues of fire. The King James Version uses the term, “cloven tongues of fire,” and that is what brings us to wear red, so that we remember. It appeared to be “something like flaming fire lighting on every one of them, which divided, and so formed the resemblance of tongues” reaching toward the heavens, according to one commentary. A candle flame is too tame and small to imagine the sensation, but in a campfire or a fireplace, if you stare at the flames, you’ll see them divide and reach upward.

In the paraphrased scripture today, the most important feature is the language. Have you ever travelled to a foreign country where you did not speak the language? When you arrive in a busy marketplace and cannot hear your native tongue of English, it can produce a slight panic if you are alone. I assume that is what the people experienced that day. Remember, Jesus has just been crucified, his body disappeared, and word was that he ascended to Heaven, so their beloved teacher was no longer with them. There was still fear and confusion for believers, especially in Jerusalem; they feared capture and death.

We see perhaps another element of terror in the second passage when Peter calls them out for their sin. Outsiders assumed their behavior was drunkenness, but Peter identifies their sin and lack of belief as a genuine reason for fear. Some fundamentalist churches still use fear tactics the terror of facing hell to entice vulnerable people to convert. This provokes an unacceptable trauma. Peter, however, invites them to know Christ, receive the promised fellowship, repent from their past sins, and accept the saving love and grace Jesus came to give.

Their terror turned to wonder and awe, as they realized there was hope! First, they were speaking in the tongues of their birthplace, which must have been comforting. Think back to your mother's voice—perhaps the last phone call you had with her, or the last time she said I love you! The miracle of peace amid the chaos would be calming. Second, they could understand each other! Even though the languages were different, the miracle of translation was in that place. Perhaps that will be what heaven will be like for us—the wonder and deep understanding of multilingual interpretation and kindred spirits. Third, and perhaps the key point is that in the middle of a whirlwind of terror, they needed protection. Last week, like we shared about the active demonstration of love of mothers and mother figures, perhaps this Day of Pentecost was the active demonstration of God's love for **us**. He sent the Holy Spirit, comforter, and advocate to those 120 because of his divine love, not for punishment. Peter's sermon calms them and invites them to experience the wonder of a repented life, given by Jesus; he offers them and us the Lord's protection from eternal punishment and damnation. Over 3,000 were saved that day. Those 120 believers then shared their experience with others despite their fears of the government; they managed to baptize over 3,000!

What could you do to share with just one individual? What can we do to build relationships and disciple those we help with benevolence funds? What does that look like? It looks like the joy of prayer, sandwiches, meals, dishes, clothing, blankets, furniture, housing, transportation, education, and medication. Mostly, it looks like relationship and agape love. This Pentecost, as we conduct the business of

our church in the council meeting after the service, let us hold tight to the mission of this church body of believers and the commandments God calls us to – to love him and our neighbor. Amen? Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for both the wake-up call of the wildfire like wind of the Holy Spirit and the wonder and encouragement of the invitation to love you. We surrender ourselves to your care and teaching. We thank you for the mystery of miracles then and now. We ask you to continue to bless this community, church, and Mission Center. Embolden us to share our faith in you. We pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**