

**The Day of Pentecost, June 9th 2019**  
**St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ (Acts 2:1-21/Series C)**  
**"Send It on Down"**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Creator, Redeemer, and Life-giving Spirit. Amen.

Happy Pentecost! It's wonderful to be here this morning, as we celebrate with Christians all around the world what we call the "birthday" of the church. That was the day more than 2,000 years ago, when the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus' first disciples and a movement was started a movement that would change the world forever, mostly for the good.

How wonderful too, that today we will celebrate and witness what our Confirmands will be doing at our 10:30 AM service. For they will affirm their baptisms and be confirmed in the faith. You see, in addition to what they've learned from the Bible, the Small Catechism, or ancient church history, we have stressed this year that the most important part of this Confirmation experience has been their understanding that Confirmation is their saying "Yes" to the God who said "Yes" to them in their baptism, long before this day.

God said to them and to us in our baptisms, "Yes, I love you". "Yes, you belong to me forever." "Yes, I will be with you always and in all ways, no matter where you go or what you do. Yes, you are mine." So, besides them moving from being "youth" members to more responsible, mature and even voting "adult" members of St. John's, they will be saying "Yes, they want to follow Jesus as long as they live."

A few weeks ago, I was in Minneapolis at the Festival of Homiletics with about 1600 preachers from all over the world. Besides those from the United States, there were people from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, S. Korea, and Africa. I was amazed --- both at how far people were willing to come in order to learn how to be better preachers, and at the incredible diversity that

was present at the conference.

Those who had attended for multiple years said that they came because they were fed at the Festival in ways that preachers are not always used to being fed. They were nourished by the Word -- we worshiped together a few times a day, and listened to at least 3 sermons daily for 4 days in a row, in addition to attending workshops. It was clear that people were fed by the collegiality and connecting with friends from near and far. But it was also clear that people came because the preachers were awesome and it was just good to be drenched in the word of God.

One of my favorite preachers was the Rev. Dr. William Barber, whom some of you know because he's one of the leaders of the Poor People's Campaign and started the Moral Monday Movement in North Carolina. Moral Mondays are the days when people of faith and people of goodwill gather around the statehouse in North Carolina to protest government policies that do everything from gutting laws that protect the environment, to gun control, to stripping elderly and poor Black folks of their voting rights. These are some of the same issues that our Confirmands expressed serious concern about last month when Erica Earnest from our Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy ministry was our preacher and forum leader.

When our youth got the mike to speak, it was tough for them to let it go because they want to be heard. They want their concerns to be listened to and acted upon, for these are issues that people of faith *need* to be care about regardless of one's political party. You see, we know that when people, especially those who are poor and marginalized, or even the earth itself, are treated unjustly, *God* cares and calls God's people to do justice and make right what is wrong in our society.

Rev. Barber was one of the preachers at Central Lutheran Church, one of the larger

congregations out there in the Midwest where the Lutherans are denser than here on the East Coast. When he got up to preach, he welcomed the congregation to Central Penta-Baptist-Lutheran church and told us that we needed to get ready for the Spirit to come down and fill the people, and that's exactly what happened in the sanctuary.

As he preached (for at least around 30-35 minutes) yes, we Lutherans tend to be a little skimpy on the sermon times before folks start looking at their watches --- anyway, as he preached, people started standing up and clapping and saying, "Amen" and "Preach it". It felt like a Pentecost moment for sure. People weren't speaking in tongues or anything like that, but I did get a sense of what that first Pentecost must have been like when those early disciples and others were gathered waiting for the gift of the Spirit.

Before he ascended, Jesus reminded them that they were witnesses to all that he had said and done. And he told them that their mission now was to tell *all nations* that in his name, turning to God for freedom and forgiveness of sins was possible, and that he was going to send his Spirit upon them as God had promised; so they needed to stay in the city until they received power from on high.

After his ascension, Jesus' disciples had returned to Jerusalem and gathered where they often did with his mother and brothers and certain other women, praying fervently for the coming of the Spirit and waiting for what Jesus had promised. They were waiting on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish festival that happens 50 days after Passover. In ancient times it celebrated the end of the spring harvest; but eventually it came to commemorate the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

So, there they were in Jerusalem, all together in one place when suddenly the Spirit came

upon the community with the sound of a "rushing wind" and with "tongues as of fire" resting on each of them. When the Spirit descended, the people began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. They spoke in actual languages so that everyone who had either immigrated to Jerusalem or come there for the festival could understand what was being said. People from all over the world were surprised to hear someone speaking their own native language so far away from their homes. It would be like people coming to St. John's this morning and hearing folks speaking in English, Tamil, Creole, Hebrew, Swedish, and Spanish!

But what was even *more* amazing than the people speaking in other languages was what they were speaking about, for they were all praising God and telling about the great things that God had done through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The people gathered were both astounded and perplexed about what was happening.

I think there must have been some ancient Lutherans in that crowd too, because just like the question that Luther asked in the Small Catechism, some of the people present asked, "What does this mean?" But others ridiculed them and said, "Oh, they're just drunk, they're filled with new wine."

What *does* it mean, sisters and brothers that the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers on that first Pentecost and still does so today? "What does it mean, those first believers asked?" And, as was often the case, Peter was the first to respond. *"These people aren't drunk, he said, it's only 9:00 in the morning. No, in the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon **all** flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit."*

The people gathered on that very first Pentecost asked an important question. But for us 21st

century Pentecost people, we know something of the church's answer to that question. We know, as Luther said, that "while we cannot by our own understanding or strength come to Jesus Christ or believe in him, that the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel and enlightened us with her gifts; just as the Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth."

And the Spirit does this, or as the prophet Joel said, the Spirit is poured out not only upon the church, but upon all flesh so that we might dream dreams of unity and see vision of peace, so we might work for justice and build bridges of understanding. The spirit calls and gathers so that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

But sisters and brothers, many will not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ if not for you and me. If not for our words and actions, if not for our faithful witness and works of justice and compassion, many people in our families, neighborhoods, and around the world will never know that Jesus has come to bring life and light to all nations. They will never know the Holy Spirit, the one who gives life anew to all; they will never know our loving God who creates, redeems and sustains us day after day.

So let us pray for the coming of the Spirit, not only on this Pentecost Sunday but everyday of our lives; that we may be the people God wants us to be and the weary world needs us to be--- people filled with the Spirit's power of healing and hope for all. Yes, let this be our song and our prayer, as Rev. Barber so powerfully preached: "Send it on down, Lord. Send it on down. Come, come, come Holy Spirit, come." Amen.

*Pastor Gladys G. Moore*