



## WEEKLY STUDY May 28-June 3, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.) Sunday is Pentecost, and we are in our fourth week of our May theme: "God of the **MOVEMENT**." The play on words is intentional. We believe in a God of movement – calling us forth, sending us out; the ebb and flow of discipleship. And we believe in a God of the moment. We believe in a God who speaks to us here and now, all day long, through other people, Scripture, nature, signs and wonders – in moments both large and small.

### **Our scripture is: Acts 2:1-21**

"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.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all of these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

*'In the last days it will be, God declares,  
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
And your young men shall see visions,  
And your old men shall dream dreams.*

*Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
In those days I will pour out my spirit;  
And they shall prophesy.  
And I will show portents in the heaven above  
And signs on the earth below,  
Blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
The sun shall be turned to darkness  
And the moon to blood,  
Before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.  
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

- 1) In the calendar of the Christian Year, this Sunday is called "Pentecost Sunday", and is referred to as the birthday of the church because 3000 people were baptized on that day. We too often think of Pentecost just in terms of the Christian faith, but it was a Jewish festival. Pastor Sam reminded us that it was a festival occurring 50 days (thus the word Pente – for 50) after the Passover and was a celebration of the wheat harvest. For this reason the city would have been packed with people. So all of those gathered (along with the disciples) would have heard what happened. While the disciples were receiving the gift promised to them, they then went among the crowd witnessing to the movement of God in that moment.

**Question: Imagine yourself as one of those gathered who saw and heard the witness of the disciples. How do you think you would have received the message of Peter. Do you think you would have been one of the 3000 baptized on that day? Why? Or do you think you would have been one who was skeptical? Why?**

- 2) Pastor Sam pointed out Peter's admonition to those gathered listening to his sermon to "save yourself from this corrupt generation." She then recounted how this statement felt appropriate to her at this time and talked about the event at Woodmont Christian Church called "After Covenant: Faith, Guns, and Protecting Tennesseans." She told how the pastor, Rev. Clay Stauffer, talked about the polarization of our country where people yell, point fingers, become grid-locked instead of working together to come up with life-changing revisions to policies in need of change. Sam talked about weariness with this condition and contrasted it with what happened at Pentecost. In the presence of God's spirit, barriers were broken. All people could understand the message of God in their own language. Through the Holy Spirit, with barriers broken, and people divided could understand one another.

**Question: Imagine a Pentecost moment now, with barriers broken down. What are your hopes and dreams about what changes could happen if we let the Holy Spirit lead us beyond our barriers?**

- 3) Pastor Sam led us through numerous scripture references of God revealed through wind and breath. Likewise, it was the same for images of God leading through fire. She reminded us of the power of both these elements, and of how they have been used to signify the spirit of prophecy, speaking the truth about God and the human condition.

**Question: Where do you see God's spirit seeking to break through to us, leading us to speak and act for love and justice?**

4) So often, in teaching confirmation and helping young people verbalize their own faith and beliefs, we've had difficulty with the Holy Spirit. They are quick to be able to state their belief and understanding about God; about Jesus; even about the church. But the Holy Spirit proves to be harder. In worship on Sunday, we had many images, words, and songs that presented views of the Holy Spirit. These all influence us and shape our faith. Here are some of the things we saw and heard on Sunday

- Flowers of yellow, orange, and red.
- Images of doves flying over our heads.
- Surprises in the Children's Sermon that caused the children to gasp and exclaim and chatter – perhaps somewhat like those in Jerusalem on Pentecost.
- People dressed in red, orange, yellow.
- These words sung: "Breath of God, come sweeping through us. Fill your church with life and power"
- These words spoken: "We believe the Holy Spirit inspires us to acts of love and justice."
- Scripture references to wind (breath) and fire reminding us of God's power through those images.

**Question: What words, music, sounds, sights help you most in understanding the Holy Spirit? What would your statement of faith include regarding what you believe about the Holy Spirit?**

### **Prayer**

(This week's prayer contains a portion of Prayer #407 in *"The United Methodist Book of Worship"*):

***"O God, you sent the Holy Spirit to enkindle the zeal of Christ's followers waiting in Jerusalem for his promised gift.***

***Pour the same inspiration on your people here assembled, and on the Church of Christ throughout the world.***

***Revive the power of the gospel in our hearts, that it may be to us a sacred trust for the blessing of all creation."***

***Enable us, your servants, to speak and live your word with boldness, while you stretch our your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."***

***We pray this day and every day that your love will shine through us to all we meet. Amen***

**Weekly Challenge: This week take time daily to ask, "How can I (with the power of the Holy Spirit) use my voice and my actions in ways that can be understood, breaking down barriers and leading to love and justice.**

*(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)*