

## **A New Temple**

May 23, 2021

### John 15: 12-15

*<sup>12</sup> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.*

### Acts 2: 1-21

*<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs — in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power".*

*<sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> '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. <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*



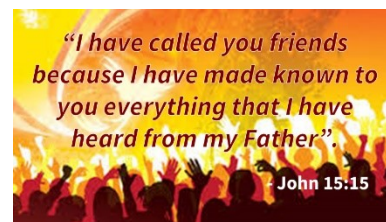
Welcome to Pentecost Sunday! Over the course of this sermon series we have been looking at our call to grow in Christ and at the charge to bring the kingdom of God

to earth. Recently we considered the invitation to "abide in Christ" – to develop a true friendship with Jesus that is personal and intimate. This past week we considered the call to live in the world but not of the world. Today, on Pentecost Sunday, we explore what it looks like to live in Holy Spirit-led Christian community. As we do so, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Pentecost is known in Christian circles as the birthday of the church. This unique and powerful event changed the trajectory of the first-century Jesus movement. The Jewish faith had always been building-centered. The earliest “building” was the tabernacle – a mobile tent that housed the presence of God during the exodus years in the desert. With the building of the temple during Solomon’s reign, God’s “home” became fixed in one location. Synagogues were built in various towns for local worship and study, but the priestly order and power remained entrenched in Jerusalem in the temple and all sacrificial acts took place at the temple. God’s presence continued to reside in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies – the inner sanctuary that could only be entered once a year by the high priest. As Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary was torn in two. This symbolized the beginning of a new way to connect to God. In the incarnation humanity got to know God in the flesh. In Jesus we saw what it looked like to fully live out God’s love in the world. It was up close and personal. It was step one of a new relationship with God. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost completed this process.

As we begin this morning, I invite you to turn with me to John 15. Yes, this is a passage that we read just two weeks ago. I chose to include it again this morning because it speaks of the new relationship that was furthered at Pentecost. In John 15, verse twelve, Jesus first commands us to love one another. In the next verses Jesus speaks of sacrifice and of obeying God’s commands as a manifestation of that love.

Jesus calls us “friends” instead of servants, saying, *“I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father”*. With



this change, Jesus elevated the form of love to agape love – that unconditional, no-matter-what love. Loving God and one another in agape love was step two in the newly forming connection with God and with one another.



As we continue, please turn with me to Acts 2. In the opening chapter of Acts, Jesus ascends into heaven and the disciples replace Judas Iscariot with Matthias. As chapter two begins, the followers of Jesus have gathered in a home on the day of Pentecost. This sacred day was part of one of the three special Jewish festivals. *Shavuot* celebrates the wheat harvest and the giving of the Torah, or Law, on Mount Sinai. Many Jews would come to Jerusalem each year to be a part of this celebration. The celebration would center in the temple – the home of God. From the earliest days of the faith, a wild flame was in the Holy of Holies. It represented God’s presence with the people. Also from these earliest of days the prophets spoke of all the rituals as nothing more than shadows of the coming realities that all people would experience. In the second part of our Acts passage Peter quotes from one of these Old Testament prophets. Joel was, of course, just one of many Old Testament prophets who spoke of the Messiah. Scattered throughout the Hebrew Bible are dozens and dozens of prophecies that relate to and speak of Jesus.

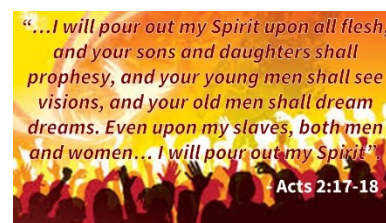
As thousands of Jews from all over the world gather at the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate *Shavuot*, a small group of disciples also gathers in a private home. *"Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting"*. This heavenly ruckus draws a crowd. In verses three and four we read, *"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"*. The divine presence that resided in the Holy of Holies now comes to rest on each of the disciples. The crowd that gathered outside the home hears the believers speaking the good news of Jesus Christ – each in his or her own native language. From the corners of the earth, Jews and converts both, hear the believers speaking of *"God's deeds of power"*. Amazed and astonished, they wonder how these Galileans can be speaking God's word in so many different languages. They are amazed at the truth they hear; they are astonished at how the good news is being shared. Some wonder what this all means, but others look for an easy way to dismiss the call of the Spirit that they were feeling upon their hearts.

Peter then stands, with the other eleven disciples, and takes on those wishing simply to dismiss what they have witnessed. Those who want to easily dismiss what has happened say the believers are "drunk". It is an easy way out, an easy explanation. The easy way out. Sometimes we take that, don't we? While that is true once in a while, I also thought about the other side of things. Those that received the Holy Spirit were totally filled by its power.

I wondered, when have I been so sold out for the Spirit that others wondered about me. Have you ever been so invested in something for God that maybe others wondered about you?

That connects to my next thoughts. This passage raised a lot of questions within me. What if I were there in that house that day – would I be willing to be on the receiving end of the Holy Spirit that day? Maybe I would hear the wind and then see the flames beginning to descend and I would run or try and hide. Would you be willing to be on the receiving end? Would or could we believe what was happening enough to allow ourselves to be a part of what God was doing? And even if we were filled, would we be willing to speak the words that the Holy Spirit was placing in our hearts? I hope you and I would. But I also know that I have ignored or denied the voice or nudge of the Holy Spirit a time or two.

Continuing on in our passage from Acts 2, Peter speaks. Quoting from the Old Testament prophet Joel, Peter speaks these words of truth in verses seventeen and eighteen: *"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".* God will pour out his Spirit. Young and old, men and women, will speak. They will prophesy, they will dream dreams, they will see visions. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the believers speak the good news to people from all over the world.



Being poured out, the Spirit goes forth. It is no longer contained in the wild flame found burning in the temple. The Spirit alights on all people who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God incarnate in Jesus becomes the Spirit dwelling in all who believe.

The connection to God can now become personal, as intimate as it could be – living in you and in me, creating a new temple inside of each of us. Yet there is a scary side to accepting this connection, to entering into this new reality too, isn't there? The Holy Spirit remains that wild flame that had burned so long in the temple. As with all fire, there is always some danger. Once we invite Jesus into our hearts and begin to sense and understand the whispers and nudges of the Spirit, then we realize that we cannot control it, that we cannot then try to limit God's love. Once that fire really begins to burn within our hearts and souls, we become captive to it, we become humble servants of the Spirit. Even here we are sometimes like those that wanted to dismiss the power of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost. Sometimes we think God is less than he is. It is a kind of self-defense. We reflect that in our faith when we are only willing to commit so far, when we are only willing to give so much, when we will only go so far for God's love or for the other. Sometimes we think God is less than he is.



Returning to the big picture, what does this story of Pentecost mean for the church, for you and for me?

First, God's presence is not limited to the temple. Today we would say that God's presence is not limited to any building or church for that matter. Not to Grace, not to Hillsvew, not to Genesis or Atonement Lutheran,

not to Our Lady of the Black Hills. The temple or the church, both with all of its exclusive rights and rules or laws, would be supplanted with the revelation of God's living presence in all and through all. God offers to dwell in each of us, to guide us, teach us, correct us, comfort us, lead us.

Second, a new community of faith was birthed at Pentecost. The new community of God is no longer bound by nation, tribe, language, social class, political party, or any other human construct. The holy and divine presence of God is no longer held within the walls of the temple. God's dwelling place is now made available to all people – absolutely no one is excluded. The invitation goes out to young and old, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor, black and white and brown and yellow and every other color found on the spectrum. There is no one outside the circle of God's love.

Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in all people, through the uniting presence of God in each of us, the body of Christ becomes the new temple through which the glory of God will be manifest on earth as it is in heaven. All people everywhere are welcome to be a part of this new reality. The invitation is there. So the two remaining questions are these: Does one have eyes and ears to perceive this new reality? Has the invitation been extended? If one has eyes and ears to perceive, then one can choose to connect with God by accepting Jesus as Lord and by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. But if one has not received the invitation, then we have work to do.



After all, the great commission was to make disciples of all peoples for the transformation of the world. How will they hear if we do not speak? How will they know if we do not tell them?

Let us pray...

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. Over the course of your journey of faith, how have you grown to better hear and follow the voice of the Holy Spirit?
- 2) *Pray*. How has the Spirit been prompting you lately? Pray for the strength to believe all things are possible with God.
- 3) *Study*. Read John 16: 12-15. How has the Spirit of truth revealed God and his wisdom to you lately?