

**Sermon**  
**Pentecost Sunday**  
**Calvary Lutheran Church, Morro Bay**  
**June 5, 2022**  
**Acts 2:1-21**

Here we are at Pentecost Sunday, one of the three major festivals of the Christian church, along with Christmas and Easter! I wonder what's going to happen today? You know, it wasn't just the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem on this day two thousand years ago. It was also Jewish people and God seekers from around the ancient world. They had come for what was and is called in Hebrew, *Shavuot*, which in English is translated as "weeks." The date of *Shavuot* is seven weeks from the second day of Passover. That would be forty-nine days. Called in Greek, *Pentecost*, which means fifty. It's a day off. The festival was originally a commemoration of the first harvest of wheat, and offerings were brought to Jerusalem for the occasion, along with offerings of grapes, figs, barley, pomegranates, olives and dates! All the best crops of the Mediterranean!

In time, *Shavuot* came to commemorate the giving of the Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. Double purpose, you see. *Passover* and *Shavuot* were connected through the deliverance story of the Hebrews. From the last of the plagues when the first-born around Egypt were killed, (except for the Hebrew babies, who were passed over by the angel of death) and the pharaoh's release of the Hebrew slaves, through the wilderness, to the holy mount of Sinai. Salvation and then establishment of the community that would become Israel.

This is the same calendar period that we have been celebrating the Easter season, and the visits of the resurrected Jesus and the waiting for the Holy Spirit. Do you see how they are connected?

There's another important comparison. When the Israelites left Egypt, they didn't quite know where they were going or how they would get there. There was the Red Sea on one side and pharaoh's army on the other, with no apparent route of escape. But God executed a plan, a miracle. Motion picture depictions of the scene are majestic and impressive, but the real thing? I can't imagine. And then which direction to go? Well, of course, the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Nothing big. The striking of the stone for needed water. And then they ran out of food. Well, there were the quail and a substance, appearing like morning dew, sufficient enough for the day. The name of the substance? Manna. In English, "What is it?"

Well, did you notice the reactions of the people in today's lesson from Acts, when the wind blew through and the tongues of fire alit on heads, and the disciples began jabbering in languages they themselves couldn't understand, but the pilgrims from everywhere else could understand! It depends upon which translation or paraphrase you read, but I find these English words used to describe the reactions of people: bewildered, blown away, amazed, perplexed, confused, joking, surprised, puzzled, flummoxed. When God acts mightily, that is the mood that prevails. "What is going on?" On a smaller scale, when one comes into this sanctuary, the bright red of the paraments is intended to wake us up. Something unusual is happening today! Something exciting, new, promising, and inexplicable! Are you ready for it?

In the early part of the 1900s, there was the beginning of a movement afoot, with preachers who spoke about the Pentecost event not being stuck in the past, but still capable of happening in the present day. They talked about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of speaking in tongues, or interpreting those tongues, of spontaneous healing, of direct experience of God, that could be available at that moment.

A one-eyed former slave Texan preacher named William J. Seymour was invited to visit and preach at the home of an African-American woman in Los Angeles in the spring of 1906, on Bonnie Brae St. On the night of April 9<sup>th</sup>, the group was knocked from their chairs to the floor and began speaking in tongues and praising God. The experiences went on over several nights attracting visitors to the house, who were baptized in the Spirit, who were healed and who received salvation. One night there were so many pressing in that the front porch caved in. Nobody was hurt, but the group decided that an alternative venue was needed.

They rented a two-story dilapidated building on Azusa St., a former AME church, and also a livery stable, storage building, tenement house, even tombstone shop. It was dusty, cramped, with an eight-foot ceiling on both floors, planks on barrels for seats, no pulpit, no platform. Rev. Seymour sat behind two empty shoe or milk boxes, often hidden from view. Three to fifteen hundred people would gather, among the leftover flies. There were no instruments, no collections, no advertisements, no church organization. The Holy Ghost was the leader.

The Los Angeles Times wrote about the church with its weird doctrine and fanatical rites, the state of mad excitement, the peculiar zeal, the hideous howling, the nerve-wracking attitude of prayer and supplication. Can you imagine? Doesn't sound too different from what things might have been in Jerusalem that day!

Another report remarked on the proud, well-dressed preachers who came to "investigate" the church, and before long, their high looks were replaced with wonder, then conviction, and then you will find them in a short time wallowing on the dirt floor, asking God to forgive them and make them as little children.

Others described the goings on as including sporadic, extended silence punctuated by people being slain in the Spirit, testimonies, prayers read from letters, altar calls, Bible reading, loud shouting. A disapproving person wrote, They jump, run, shake all over, shout to the top of the voice, spin around in circles, fall on the floor, jeering, kicking, passing out as dead, acting as though under a spell.

Does that sound like fun? From this Azusa Street revival, over the course of about six or seven years, came the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement, that today encompasses over 700 million people, which comprises the second largest Christian denomination in the world, after the Catholic Church.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Have you experienced Pentecostal worship? Many, many people in the Spanish-speaking world are Pentecostal. We had lunch yesterday with Pastor Esteban and Angie and their daughter Angel yesterday, and the way they spoke, it sounds like they know how to appeal, from a Lutheran standpoint, to the Pentecostal spirit. Jack and Jean Senter said that they visited them for worship, and participated in a procession around the church with trumpets and drums and singing, and the two hundred plus persons crammed into the sanctuary. And the enthusiasm! I'm happy for them!

For many Lutherans, enthusiasm is NOT a good thing in worship. We don't raise our hands in worship. We do not shout Amen!, generally, definitely don't roll on the floor or get slain in the Spirit or shake. We require in our worshipers an ability to read, to follow the lead of the pastor, to resist dancing, to not interrupt the sermon. I'm fine with that. I'm also fine, to an extent, with some of the other things! Can you see their appeal?

Look, I am Lutheran because my grandparents, children of Swedish immigrants, were Lutheran. Once married, they lived in various places on the west side of downtown Los

Angeles, where a congregation called Angelica was founded, and eventually had a grand sanctuary built on Burlington Avenue, which backed up on, of all locations, Bonnie Brae St. The same street where Pentecostalism was started anew. This fact is significant to me. Last week, I preached about how I didn't think denominations could or would all subsume their differences to become one, unified organization. But I also believe that there's nothing wrong with sharing good ideas.

Because there's also something deeper going on in Pentecost, besides the wind and fire and shouting and enthusiasm. There is the fact that, when the Holy Spirit comes down, ANYTHING can happen. This "anything" doesn't have to be anything beyond our comfort zones, though maybe that's not true. I do know that when we are open to what the Holy Spirit might want to do, we notice things better. When we are open, people who come here feel it. When we are curious about our own future in Christ, we might very well say when something unusual or unexpected happens, "What is this?" But we don't need to follow it up with, "Get behind me, Satan!" The new thing is not necessarily bad. Surely, it must be examined to see if it conforms to what we know about what are the fruits of the Spirit, love, kindness, gentleness, patience and the like. And not all that is new is good, and the new is not necessarily, by itself, good. But we come, we look, we see, we decide.

Like the delightful paraphrase of Romans 8, "This resurrection life we received from God is not a timid grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a child-like 'What's next, dear God?'" I love that, "Dear God." Usually when we say that, we might mean, "Oh, not again!" or "What's going on now?" But it can also mean, "Oh, Welcome!" or "What have we here?" or "Nice to meet you!"

Being open to what's next in the life of the Holy Spirit can cause us to hear God's word better, to love people better, to give of ourselves better, to participating in healing better, to finding out better how we truly live in abundance. So, let's see what happens!

Rev. Brian Stein-Webber

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