

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 28 May 2023**  
**Pentecost Day - Year A**

**1st Reading: Acts 2:1-21**

**Psalm: 104:24-34, 35b**

**2nd Reading: I Corinthians 12:3b-13**

**Gospel: John 20:19-23**

**Sermon** - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø*

In the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, I hope everyone got your Pentecost shopping done in time. Did you get all your Pentecost presents wrapped? Send out your Pentecost cards? [I did - I hope you got them] Put up your Pentecost tree? Bake your Pentecost cookies? Are you ready to sing Pentecost carols? [Actually, we will be singing one this morning]

Well, I do see that many of you are wearing red today. There is at least one fun Pentecost custom that we can follow. But why don't we seem to have any others?

Next to Easter, Pentecost is the most important day in the church's calendar, our feast commemorating the coming of the Holy Spirit, celebrated by Christians long before Christmas was ever celebrated. And just think what it is we are celebrating today. The Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and they were filled with power, truth, love, and unity. The world had been split into nations that spoke different languages ever since the Tower of Babel way back in Genesis 11, before God had called Abraham and made him the father of the people of Israel, before Moses had freed Israel from Egypt, before King David and King Solomon, and all the prophets. Now that division of language had been healed as the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to tell the Gospel story of Jesus' death and resurrection to people of every land and every tongue. And the Spirit empowered those same apostles to then go out into those lands to make disciples of every nation.

But Pentecost isn't just something that happened once to those eleven apostles long ago. The Holy Spirit has continued to be present in the church to this very day, and each one of us has received that Holy Spirit through our baptism. As Luther writes in his Small Catechism:

“The Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with her gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as she calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins - mine and those of all believers.”

What a wonderful gift. And as Paul writes today: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

There’s that unity again - we are all one - but within that unity we each have our unique gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit that enable us to serve God, serve one another, and serve the world to bring it to Christ, each in our own unique way. So we celebrate today the coming of the Holy Spirit, and how the Spirit has blessed each one of us - and so it is a very good time to thank everyone for sharing with the church those gifts that the Holy Spirit has given each one of you. Thank you!

But why don’t we treat Pentecost in the same festive way that we do Christmas or Easter? I don’t really have an answer for that, but I do think maybe it’s time we do something about it.

I’ve looked up what traditions there have been in times gone by for Pentecost, and haven’t really come up with much. In some places it is traditional to eat lamb stew - I suspect especially in Ireland - and in many places it has been a time to decorate homes, churches, and towns with flowers, so we do again thank the family of Bill and Laura Derr for the beautiful flowers in the sanctuary this morning, keeping that tradition alive.

If you have ever been to Rome you might have visited the Pantheon, which was dedicated in the year 609 as a Christian church dedicated to all saints, and this was the beginning of our celebrations of All Saints Day. And if you’ve been to the Pantheon, you might remember that it is topped with a large round dome, but at the very top of the dome there is a round hole so that it is open to the sky. Well, on Pentecost Sunday, it is traditional in Rome to make a shower of rose petals from that hole at the top of the Pantheon, descending like tongues of flame onto the worshippers below.

And in some churches it was customary to blow trumpets during the reading of the story of Pentecost to symbolise the wind that surrounded the apostles that morning.

It seems that in Germany it was traditional to have a picnic on Pentecost. And in some places in England it is traditional to roll cheeses down a hill, then go rolling after them, and then have Morris dances. I must confess that we didn't see any cheese-rolling in our 17 years in England, although we did see plenty of Morris dancing.

Beyond that, all I could come up with for Pentecost celebrations was the idea of baking cookies in the shape of tongues of fire, so after the service today, there will indeed be flame-shaped cookies in the fellowship hall to go with our ice cream - that will be a pretty good Pentecost party. So maybe we could initiate some new Pentecost customs, and I am certainly open to any suggestions so that we can plan well in advance for next year.

I did promise you Pentecost carols, however. And I have two of them, but unfortunately the ELW has changed the translation of both of them from the original versions which were in the green LBW. The first is quite an ancient hymn, from around the year 800, which was translated into English around the year 1600 by John Cosin, the Bishop of Durham, our beloved cathedral where we were members:

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire  
and lighten with celestial fire;  
thou the anointing Spirit art,  
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,  
and thee, of both, to be but one;  
that through the ages all along  
thy praise may be our endless song!

Praise to thine eternal merit,  
Father, son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

My second Pentecost carol may not seem to be specifically about the Holy Spirit, but it was written by William Draper, the pastor of Leeds, now in North Yorkshire, where our daughter Arwen earned her PhD; and it was written for a children's Pentecost party in Leeds around the year 1900, and it just happens to be my favourite hymn. It is a rough translation of the Canticum of the Sun, by Saint Francis of Assisi, written near the end of his life when he was very ill and nearly blind.

It is certainly *appropriate* for Pentecost. Not only has the Holy Spirit restored unity in the voices of humanity, but our unity with the created world and all of nature as well, so Saint Francis in this hymn calls on all of creation together to praise our Lord - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And as I said, this hymn was written by William Draper for a children's Pentecost party. So I wonder what sort of party it was. Did they play games like "Pin the flame on the apostle"? Probably not. Did they roll cheeses down a hill? Maybe, but they almost certain *did* have fun festive food to eat, and of course, they did sing the Pentecost carol "All Creatures of Our God and King", as we will do at the end of today's service.

We do also have a *few* other hymns in our hymnal that relate to the Holy Spirit and Pentecost, one of the best of which is our hymn of the day today, Spirit of Gentleness, which remembers ways in which the Holy Spirit is present throughout the Bible, in our lives, and into the future. So as we sing it we may contemplate how the Spirit comes to each of us in our lives and how we may respond to the Spirit's calling.

The Holy Spirit is come! Alleluia!

*Copyright © 2023 - Thomas J. Mosbø*