“A Prideful Pentecost”

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Acts 2:1-21

June 8, 2025 – Pentecost

***Acts 2:1-21***

***When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.***

***5Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”***

***14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202%3A1-21%0A&version=NRSVue&interface=print&showfootnotes=no&showxrefs=no&showheadings=no&showwoj=no#fen-NRSVUE-26953a)***] and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:***

***17‘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.  
18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.  
19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.  
21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’***

Last week we marked the Ascension of Jesus, a crucial point in the life of God’s continuing work in our world. Before Jesus ascended he named our work as his followers. Bear witness. It’s enough to put a pastor out of business! You don’t need to fill 20 minutes with a three point exposition of the Gospel – what’s with all the words? Bear witness. That’s it. Tell what you yourself have experienced; declare what you have seen to be true.1 Jesus was sent from God to live life as a human in every way, for a reason; Jesus died for a reason, and Jesus ascended in service of that same reason – from God’s right hand, as an embodied risen Christ, Jesus became our Lord and sent the Holy Spirit to take us by the hand and open our eyes and hearts and lead us to a life as witnesses. How we witness is up to us.

Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, is a Jewish harvest festival known as the Feast of Weeks. It is one of three festivals for pilgrimages to Jerusalem, which explains why “they were all gathered in one place.” The huge list of cities that Jorie read today represent the multicultural and multiethnic tableau that was Judaism – fifteen different regions located on three different continents. The diversity within Judaism was something to be celebrated. This list of cities is not exhaustive, but is broad in scope and for this reason, is tremendously important for us.

Diversity has been a defining basic tenant of Christianity from the beginning. Every time Jesus interacted with and for the benefit of a new “type” – whether it was someone with a demon, someone deemed unfit for society, someone from a rival city, a woman, gentiles – he was criticized. And every time he was criticized, Jesus had to explain the concept of “all.” I imagine Jesus giving a huge sigh and saying, “Ok, let’s review.” Someone wanted in, society wanted them out. Can you name some “types” that have been excluded just in American history? (blacks, women, gay/queer, learning challenged, neuro-diverse, physically challenged, wounded in any way, etc.) In art we celebrate, “There are so many ways to be different!” In society, we protect ourselves from these same differences! Why is that?

June is Pride month, a time when we are encouraged to celebrate all that stands behind even the need for a pride month. Those on the outside constantly knocking on the door, having to knock *down* the door, just to get a seat at the table. Just to live. Bear witness? Witness the transgender military folks being put on administrative leave after careers as top notch officers, having to say goodbye to their colleagues. Witness the fear of the two women who want the world to know how excited they are about their new love, but can’t share. Witness the work of same gendered parents who raise beautiful children into beautiful adults and have had to fight against systems that don’t recognize them both as parents. Witness the systems, including the Church, who have not just closed but slammed doors in the faces of questioning teens. Why are humans so hard on each other? Because we are afraid. We have these amygdala’s that tell us that everything around us is a lion. Weren’t we supposed to evolve beyond that?

Our denomination has long struggled with the inclusion of folks who are different. Our denomination’s history includes arguments in favor of slavery due to the economic benefits! I’ve mentioned before our denominations history of including our LGBTQ siblings, and Bethany’s commitment to the cause by naming ourselves a More Light Presbyterian Church. That cause was forwarded again this summer, when a recent amendment to our denomination’s Constitution was passed, that will allow “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to be included in the list of principles of representation.2

The day of Pentecost is a perfect day of Pride. But not only in June. Every day. Black Lives Matter? – every day. Witness George Floyd. Witness Breonna Taylor who *didn’t* celebrate her birthday last week. #Metoo? – it matters every day. Witness victims who never spoke up, who were not believed, who were ridiculed and shamed when they did speak up. We shouldn’t have to have these movements. But we do because people who are being left out are still knocking at the door. All the ways we are different are to be celebrated, not knocked down.

Everything we have read from the book of Acts during the past few weeks have been witnesses to the radical beginning of this beautiful faith that we have inherited. We are all at different points in our faith journey because of the witnesses of others over the centuries, over the years, and over our lifetimes. In today’s text we get to witness the growing calling of Peter, who once denied Jesus, derided at first for including gentiles in his mission, now coming into his own with his voice to the crowd. “They are not drunk!” Peter recalls words from the prophet Joel whose words reflect what the crowd is now witnessing.

*17‘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. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*

Jesus’ coming was not an end in itself. Jesus’ dying was not an end. Receiving the holy spirit is not an end in itself. “An effect of the Spirit is that people “shall prophesy.” Prophecy takes many forms – “**Pentecost announces that Jesus’ followers will discover new outlooks on what is real and what is possible** in these new days of salvation. Prophetic insight therefore involves much more than seeing into the future. In Acts it predominantly involves preaching, interpreting Scripture, urging others toward repentance, and embodying mutual care in how people live, eat and worship.” (p.42) “…**the prophetic Spirit leads people to adopt new perceptions**.”

Matthew Skinner (commentator) says that “…the Spirit propels Jesus’s followers to create a community that allows those who join to inhabit it and belong to it with their full selves, without surrendering their distinctiveness.” Their *full* selves. No need to surrender ones distinctiveness.

The crowd must have been amazed and worried and frightened or even angry. This new thing that God was doing was so strange, the meaning and implications were so far out that not surprisingly, some in the crowd came up with their own answer – they are drunk! What might we do if we ran across this new thing that God is creating? God is creating something so new that our imaginations aren’t big enough to realize that it’s from God. We would look to everything we know and come up with a reason that makes sense to us. They are drunk. Where in that, have we allowed room for God to do a new thing? If we have never experienced the marvel of God, how will we believe that another such marvel can happen? When we witness a great turn around, a repentance, do we allow ourselves to even believe that it was from God? Think of social movements that have made a difference. We know enough about some of the soft sciences like psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc. to know quite a bit about how humans work. It is not against any kind of science to *also* say that those things are from God. We don’t have to trade in our scientific minds in order to live a life of faith. We have both.

Witnessing is hard! Witnessing someone’s pain and staying with it long enough to eliminate it is hard! One gift of the Holy Spirit is the ability to not turn away. The Holy Spirit can bring us the desire to stay and notice – notice beauty, notice love in action, notice generosity, witness that! The Holy Spirit will also bring us the courage and strength to stay and notice pain; and will bring us the ability to participate in relieving pain and suffering. We can be witnesses of both.

Thanks be to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1Skinner, Matthew, Acts, Interpretation Bible Commentary series, 2025)

2 <https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2025/5/13/majority-presbyteries-have-approved-amendment-24-c>