

5/23/21 WORSHIP SERVICE

WORDS OF WELCOME – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Welcome! Glad to see those who are here, in front of me – and those who are tuning in via zoom. If those of you on zoom would be willing to turn on your cameras for a moment, we can see you on the screen to greet you... And we also extend an especially warm welcome to Pastor Peter Emery this morning; thanks Pete for worshiping with us and bringing the message.

Anything you'd like to share with one another this morning? Please come to the mic.

It's good to gather together on this Pentecost morning – to remember and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles.

Fun facts: Pentecost is the English translation of the ancient Greek "Festival of Weeks". It marked 7 weeks, or 50 days, Pente, since Passover. Passover and the Festival of Weeks are two of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals. Passover, of course, marking the ancient Hebrews' liberation from enslavement to the Egyptians, seven weeks marking the time it took them to travel from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. In Jesus' day, the Jewish people came to Jerusalem to celebrate these holy times in their long story of God's powerful presence in their lives. But, it wasn't only God's action they were remembering. It was also their own commitment to being in covenant with God that they were reminding themselves of.

And even now the ancient story continues with us – the new covenant people of God! And we also remember and celebrate. Fifty days, the seventh Sunday after Easter, Jesus sent his own Holy Spirit to the Apostles so that they could carry on with his presence.

I invite you to stand now and let's begin our time of worship with one of the Psalms.

All: O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Leader: All of creation looks to you for its survival.

People: When you give, creation is filled with good things. When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

Leader: When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

People: May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.

Leader: I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

All: Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

INVOCATION – PASTOR LOIS

Creator God, you have made everything in its goodness, and given life and breath through your Spirit. Send your Holy Spirit upon us, inspire us with your love and light. As we breathe, support our songs with your strong, creative wind. When we move, light our gestures with the gift of your fire. May all who are gathered here, see the inspiration of your spirit and be moved to renew the face of the earth, in the name of Jesus Christ your son and in the spirit of all that is Holy. Amen. Our quartet will lead us in songs of gathering. First, Spirit of the Living God.

CHILDREN'S STORY – RENAE PETERS

Children! It's been a long, long time since you've gathered together here, at the front for the Children's Story – but finally, this morning, we're ready to do this again. You'll notice there are carpet squares for you to sit on. To celebrate the re-introduction of this ritual we'll sing as you come forward! Number 512.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS

God of all time, the past, the present and the future, we thank you for the ancient stories of your presence with your people. We praise you for the ways you made yourself known to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for the ways they remembered and celebrated through annual festivals and rituals, passing on the stories of your faithfulness to them and their commitment to you. We praise you, God, for the ways your presence continues in the lives of the faithful, flawed though we are. We are grateful for the covenant you made with the ancients and the new covenant you made through Jesus. It is our intention, God, to follow Jesus faithfully and to honor the covenant with you – to be a light to the world, to live out and pass on what we've received from you – love, grace, forgiveness through repentance. Thank you for sending us The Spirit of goodness and holiness, the Spirit of Jesus, to guide us, comfort us, lead and help us. We pray, God that each day we would find the wisdom to follow humbly and boldly. To let go of our constant need to control, to turn loose of our angst and worries. Help us to trust in your Spirit which we cannot see or touch or manipulate, but that we can know, in our being, as we experience and pay attention and attune our own spirits to yours. This is, perhaps, one of the most difficult things you ask of us, God, to relinquish our will to yours. We often pride ourselves on our iron will. When what we need are hearts that are open, vulnerable, able to be moved and molded by your Spirit of steadfast love.

Thank you, God that you are present with us no matter what may be happening in our lives. You are able to bring healing when there is sickness or brokenness. You bring comfort and hope when there is grief or sadness. God, you bring steadiness when there are changes or transitions – as there always are in our lives. We pray for those who may be traveling this morning – grant them safety and blessings. We pray for students and teachers and all who are involved in the school schedule as they move now into summertime. Grant them a sense of accomplishment and of rest. We pray for the earth and those who work the ground, as the crops grow and produce. Grant the earth what is needed for the fullness of health and grant wisdom and joy to those who bring forth from the earth.

O God, we pray for your children all around this world who are suffering this day – from lack of what they need or from violence, from the damage done by hate or greed. We ask for your forgiveness for our own complicity in the inequities of wealth and resources. Give your people courage and wise judgment as we make decisions, individually and as a people. We ask that your Spirit would be present with leaders – local and global, that they would seek your peace and your justice for those they serve.

Bless us now as we continue to worship you – move in our midst and give what is needed for this day and the days to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION FOR THE OFFERING

Please stand for our prayer of dedication. We thank you, gracious God for all your good gifts to us. Give us generous hearts and open hands. Bless our gifts – of money, of time, of our lives as we give them to you. Amen.

SERMON – PASTOR PETER EMERY

“They were all together in one place.”
Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church
Goessel, Kansas
May 23, 2021

Acts 2:1-21¹

¹When 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 nation 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, ‘Men of Judea 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.”

I am especially pleased to be with you today, to talk about the account of the Pentecost. One of the many aspects of this congregation that I have admired is its commitment to the Mennonite tradition of reading the Bible together – not that we should all end up thinking the same thing – but that together we will come to new vision and insight into what the Bible may say to us, both individually and as a community. When we seek to grow in the love of God by becoming more conversant with the Bible, we become as one who is standing alone in an open and treeless broadly lighted field. And we stand at the edge of a dark, thick forest. And we hear, or think we hear, noises coming from the forest. They are attractive noises, confusing noises, reassuring noises, noises that make us uncertain. And when the impulse to know more, to understand more, to find more, becomes too much to resist the seekers will enter the forest to encounter whatever it is that is producing the voices. If we seekers are fortunate, as I would be confident of, we will never find our way back out of the

¹ All Biblical citations from: New Revised Standard Version Bible. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. 1989.

woods for as long as we live.

There can be few better examples of why this is so than the story of Pentecost that we celebrate today. For it is with the Pentecost event that an understanding clearly emerges that the earthly ministry of Jesus is definitely and finally accomplished in history, and we are moving here into a new era: the era of the Church.

As will so often be the case in the New Testament, it is an altogether beautiful and strange story. The Twelve Apostles, or Eleven Apostles, or some gathering of disciples - in the context we can't be sure which - are visited by the elements of wind and fire; wind and fire being commonly present in mystical self-revelations of God in the Bible.² They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak as Acts puts it "in other languages", a translation some consider problematic.

There are several tangents that we could go off on (several rabbits to chase down their holes, as a teacher of mine used to put it). Why all the talk of wine and drunkenness? What are the portents in heaven and earth that are spoken of? Why the extended accounting of the various nations people come from? I will concentrate this morning on two interrelated questions: Why should these people be listening to Peter, of all people? And what may we understand from the ability of the gathered people to suddenly understand each other?

At several points in the gospels, Peter is an almost comic figure. He inexplicably jumps into the lake when Jesus visits his fishing boat.³ He presumes to correct ideas that Jesus articulates.⁴ At the Transfiguration he goes on with pointless ideas about dwelling places rather than give attention to what Jesus is doing in the Transfiguration.⁵ And of course not too long before this account he has denied Jesus three times to civic authorities before the Crucifixion.⁶ Yet here he is; forceful, dynamic and commanding. Or he certainly strikes the gathered audience that way.

Peter has reminded these subjects of the Roman Empire what there was about Jesus that was different.

² "Both wind and fire are associated with God's self-revelation in the Hebrew Bible: cf. Ex 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:11-12; Isa 6:6". Alexander, Loveday. "Acts". *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Barton, John and John Muddiman, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 1031.

³ John 21: 7-8.

⁴ Matthew 16: 21-23; Mark 8: 31-33.

⁵ Matthew 17: 1-8; Mark 9: 2-10; Luke 9: 28-36.

⁶ Matthew 26: 69-75; Mark 14: 66-72; Luke 22: 54-62; John 18: 15-17, 25-27.

It is a difference wonderfully expressed by the historian John Dominic Crossan “Caesar and Jesus were both destined for divine Sonship, but although Caesar accepted it as domination, Jesus accepted it as crucifixion.”⁷ Various desert prophets had appeared in the Palestinian countryside promising to overthrow the Romans. They and their followers met cruel deaths at the hands of the Romans. A war to free the Jewish nation from the Romans had just been fought and had been a near complete failure. Rome and its emperor demonstrated their closeness to the gods by their complete domination.

The Christian movement began to flourish because Jesus brought poor and downtrodden people to see, as we must see, that the answer to oppressive power was not to be more powerful, the answer to cruel punishment was not to be more punitive, the answer to unjust might was not to be mightier, the answer to arrogant success was not to be more successful. By the message of Jesus people came to understand then, as we should understand now, that the Roman way of seeking to be in the world was never going to work for them. Just as the vain and prideful ways of the various Roman Empires we deal with are never going to work for us. Only a world in which the peacemakers are blessed, in which enemies can be forgiven, and which the meek may inherit can ultimately work for those who gather at Pentecost; then in that place, or in this place now. That is more powerful, more satisfying, and more lasting than any sudden understanding of language.

The event of Pentecost did not happen to isolated individuals. It happened to a community of Christians in the presence of their neighbors. Their self-understanding as Christians enabled them to uniquely understand their fellow Christians though they did not share a common language, and may, indeed, have had little in common. All that was important was that Jesus, in some way, had breathed on them, and that was all they needed to live in the Holy Spirit. And when we have life in Christ, we become the sons and daughters who prophecy, we become the young - of whatever age- who see visions, and the old - of whatever age - who dream dreams.

⁷ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed. In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004. 242.