

**Reflecting on Pentecost — Rev. Denise Stone**

**Text: John 14:21-29**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 05-23-2021**

<sup>21</sup> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” <sup>22</sup> Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. <sup>24</sup> Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

<sup>25</sup> “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. <sup>28</sup> You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup> And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.†

The Word of the Lord, **Thanks Be to God**

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Today's passage is probably not the one that most people who have been in church for any length of time would have expected to hear.

We usually read the passage from Acts, where the Holy Spirit comes on the disciples gathered in fear in an upper room in Jerusalem and "lights" on each of them as a flaming tongue. From there the disciples are empowered to speak in different languages and they go out and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the people near the temple in Jerusalem.

Acts 2:41 tells us <sup>41</sup> "So those who welcomed [Peter's] message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added."

Throughout Christendom, this event, Pentecost, is seen as the birth of the Christian Church.

This **IS** an exciting and deeply meaningful event and passage to celebrate.

We **ARE** celebrating this event today, just in a slightly different way than usual.

Our whole service, as I mentioned at the beginning today, was purposely designed to be a little different. To be more experiential, more introspective.

I want to invite you to actively reflect on Pentecost and the message that Jesus gave to his disciples immediately prior to his arrest, death and resurrection regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit.

When I say to actively reflect on Pentecost, I think of the words attributed to Henri Nouwen,

Without Pentecost the Christ-event - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - remains imprisoned in history as something to remember, think about and reflect on. The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now.

We are to remember, think and reflect on the events of the Christ-event... so that we can become living Christs here and now.

Today's passage follows Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet and is part of a larger passage that scholars have labeled Jesus' farewell discourse: the teachings that Jesus gives the disciples at the end of his physical time with them.

Jesus is preparing them for the events to come. Even though they won't fully grasp these teachings until AFTER his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A few weeks ago, when I gave a sermon on the Vine and the Branches, I referred to The Message translation where Jesus says in John 15:4, <sup>4</sup> "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you."<sup>ii</sup> Jesus talks about making our home in him here as well.

In verse 23 of our text today, Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." Additionally,

Jesus tells the disciples that God will send the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will teach the disciples everything, and will remind them of all that Jesus had said to them.

It is not just Jesus who dwells within us – it is God who dwells within us. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit dwells within those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Pentecost, the giving of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church is more than just a celebration of one pin-pointed day in the history of Christianity, Pentecost is the beginning of new life for ALL believers.

Elisabeth Johnson, Professor at the Lutheran Institute of Theology in Cameroon points out,

Earlier Jesus had spoken to his disciples of the “many dwellings” (*monai pollai*) in his Father’s house, where he was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). Now Jesus says that he and the Father will come and make their dwelling (*monên*) with those who love him and keep his word (14:23). In John’s Gospel, “eternal life” begins here and now; it is life in relationship with God through Jesus Christ (17:3). Even while Jesus prepares eternal dwellings with the Father, he and the Father will continue to dwell with his disciples in the present.<sup>iii</sup>

Hear this again: “In John’s Gospel, ‘eternal life’ begins here and now; it is life in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

The coming of the Holy Spirit into the lives of believers – both the disciples on that first day and all subsequent believers, is transformative.

Think about those first disciples on the day of Pentecost. They went from being fearful individuals huddled in an upper room to bold proclaimers of the life available to everyone as found only in Jesus Christ. The world was never the same again.

Belief in Jesus is not just an intellectual exercise. Belief in Jesus compels us to love and serve in the ways that Jesus did. Belief in Jesus compels us to put our beliefs into action.

This past week, Ann and her team of volunteers, made and distributed lunches through the Elmira Community Kitchen. Next Sunday we will gather in Fellowship Hall as a community of believers focused on providing and being a blessing to the patients at the Falck Cancer Center.

Our beliefs in action.

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I read a reflection on Pentecost 2021, written by Vanesa Zuleta Goldberg, that really spoke to me. I hope her words will touch and motivate you as well.

Reflecting on the story of Pentecost compels me to pray for that Spirit that allows for every language present to be spoken and heard, that Spirit that breaks through human boundaries and creates a space where everyone present is welcomed—a Spirit that is a force of liberation, a force of movement that empowers the disciples despite their fear to leave the upper room and share the gospel.

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Pentecost is a moment in history that continually unravels itself within our lives. In a day and age when we are marked by social evils and systemic injustice, we need to lean into the Spirit.

We need to find and help others find liberation in the movements and the rhythms of a Spirit that 2,000 years ago burst through an upper room and changed the course of history forever—a Spirit that convicts us to stand with the marginalized, reminds us of the unlimited diversity of God, and gives us strength when our human flesh fails to speak and act in accordance with the love and liberation that is gifted to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>iv</sup>

Please pray with me.

God the Holy Spirit,

You are the restless breath of love that sweeps  
through the world.  
You move where you will, breaking down barriers,  
Stirring hearts to change, making all things possible.  
Inspire each one of us to hunger and thirst for justice!

Come, Spirit of God,  
Sweep through our world bringing great change.  
May the bounty of your goodness be shared more  
justly,  
So all may share in the rich blessings of your creation.  
And, for us, bring transformation in our praying and  
living,  
So that we may act justly, love mercy,  
And walk humbly with you all the days of our lives.  
Amen.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>ii</sup> The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-of-easter-3/commentary-on-john-1423-29-3>.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202105/a-reflection-for-pentecost-sunday/>.

<sup>v</sup> <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Pentecost>. Originally posted on the Third Space website. <http://third-space.org.uk/blog>.