

Home Worship Service , Pentecost, May 31, 2020

Gathering Music

Spirit of Life Carolyn McDade sung by Orange County Unitarian Universalist Choir
<https://youtu.be/EcFZ32EHexY>

Gathering Words (first part based on Acts 2:1-6, The Message)

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. “ Then ,the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.”

How did it happen that each heard the words they needed to hear, in their own language? All sorts and conditions of people!

How does it happen now?

The Holy Spirit is still with us, ready to amaze us, ready to speak to us in our language, ready to inspire us- even in these days, even in this moment. Us and all beloved ones in this beautiful, diverse, and wonderful world.

Opening Music

What a Wonderful World [performed by Playing for Change, singers and players from all around the world]
<https://youtu.be/ddLd0QRf7Vg>

Opening Prayer

Long ago, the beloved community waited for the Spirit. We too wait, in changing times- so many changes , so many unknowns. We cannot see ahead. We do not always want to see ahead. What is around the next corner? We remember: that first community too waited, not knowing when waiting would end. Then wondrously, Spirit was among them And amazing things happened. And because of those amazing happenings, we are here today: knowing Spirit is among us still,. Even in these times, who knows what amazing happenings yet can be? Who knows what will yet be possible, even amid too much impossible. born out of all that today seems impossible. Is there a vestige of hope? Can we too hear the word we need? Can we too see visions and dream dreams? Visions beyond our seeing? Dreams beyond our doubting? Among us may Spirit work wonders yet untold, opening minds, opening hearts, and opening doors Into the fullness of what we can do and be in days to come. May it be so. Amen.

Readings

Acts 1:5-6

On one occasion Jesus told them not to leave Jerusalem . “ Wait , rather , for what God has promised , of which you have heard me speak. John baptized with water. Within a few days you will be baptized with the Spirit”

Acts 2:16-18

It's what Joel the prophet spoke of :

In days to come - it is our God who speaks- I will pour out my spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your young people will see visions and your elders will dream dreams. Even on the least of my people, both women and men, I will pour out my Spirit in these days, and they will prophesy:

Blessing for Pentecost by Jan Richardson

from Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons

For you as Pentecost Day draws near, offered with gratitude and with hope that we might continue to learn what it means to open ourselves to the Spirit who comes to us in the ache and the grace of community, even across the distances between us.

THIS GRACE THAT SCORCHES US

A Blessing for Pentecost Day

Here's one thing
you must understand
about this blessing:
it is not
for you alone.
It is stubborn
about this.
Do not even try
to lay hold of it
if you are by yourself,
thinking you can carry it
on your own.
To bear this blessing,
you must first take yourself
to a place where everyone
does not look like you
or think like you,
a place where they do not
believe precisely as you believe,
where their thoughts
and ideas and gestures
are not exact echoes
of your own.
Bring your sorrow.
Bring your grief.
Bring your fear.
Bring your weariness,
your pain,
your disgust at how broken
the world is,
how fractured,
how fragmented
by its fighting,
its wars,
its hungers,
its penchant for power,

its ceaseless repetition
of the history it refuses
to rise above.
I will not tell you
this blessing will fix all that.
But in the place
where you have gathered,
wait.
Watch.
Listen.
Lay aside your inability
to be surprised,
your resistance to what you
do not understand.
See then whether this blessing
turns to flame on your tongue,
sets you to speaking
what you cannot fathom
or opens your ear
to a language
beyond your imagining
that comes as a knowing
in your bones,
a clarity
in your heart
that tells you
this is the reason
we were made:
for this ache
that finally opens us,
for this struggle,
this grace
that scorches us
toward one another
and into
the blazing day.

Reflection - with thanks to Janice MacLean for inspiration and some quoted portions.

Well, Jesus told his friends to wait-
Go back to Jerusalem. Wait for Spirit to show up.
As the story goes, they waited about 10 days -
And then there was Spirit, spectacularly , unmistakably and transformatively.
A mighty wind blew them right out of their upper room onto the street,
Teeming with crowds from everywhere, multicultural, multilingual.

Think of St Andrews on a normal July 1- then multiply it, and multiply it again,
And think of riding on a big city subway and hearing all the different languages.

But back then no one needed Google translator. Everyone got the same , dramatic message. Whatever the message, it woke them up and it got the young church going, And growing, and growing, and growing- in time springing up not just in Jerusalem but in communities all over the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world

All starting with a small group of beloved friends, waiting.

We seem to be going in the opposite direction. Instead of gathering in public,
We've retreated indoors, alone. Instead of seeing newcomers at church, we do not even see each other.
The messages we hear weigh us down- there's nothing there to help us get going and growing.

So here we are- at home, by ourselves, waiting and waiting and then waiting some more.

There will be a lot more waiting before we can safely gather as we would like to-
And in case anyone thought otherwise, we received a grim wake-up call this week-
One person underestimating or ignoring the risks can start an outbreak.

So, if we thought our Wesley Board might meet with safe distance in our sanctuary, we are thinking again.
If we thought our Tuesday afternoon group might try an outdoor setting we are thinking again.
And I'm discouraging in-person retirement festivities as that time approaches.

It's going to be a long time. A long time of " putting plans on hold and not doing what we want to do together" "Pandemic fatigue sets in. We are tired of waiting. We are tired of not doing things".

Janice, with Tony Robinson suggests what we need now is endurance. This is spiritual practice of waiting.
As Janice reminds us, it's who we are. Forty days , forty years-generations.
Waiting for peace and justice even as we try to contribute to these. Waiting and waiting like those disciples,
"Placed on Pause between an old normal and an uncertain future "
"Stuck between Ascension and Pentecost"

And even today, the day when Spirit is supposed to show up. We are still on pause- even more so than we thought we might be. We are still trusting that Spirit will be along.

Of course Spirit is already here. Spirit has always been here. The very breath of life , without which we would not be. But this year Spirit shows herself differently. Not in dramatic large group extravaganzas-
Not when we can't even do a small group extravaganza. Spirit ,being of God, desires our wellbeing and must adapt her appearance accordingly.

No, Spirit shows herself within our endurance. Our determination to keep on keeping safe and keeping each other safe, Our determination to keep on being church even when we cannot physically gather,
Our determination to keep on caring for each other, Our determination to keep on putting what we can into an envelope or into electronic giving, Yes even that, so that our beloved community can continue to be,
And that each of us may feel the love and support we need from this community.

And endurance includes- being resourceful , being adaptable, being resilient, focusing not on what we cannot do but on what we can do.

We can worship online- and for those who don't do Zoom, there is plenty on Facebook and YouTube- We can look at church on TV. We can read our Bibles and write in our journals and keep up our personal prayer and meditation. We can listen to that hymn or that song which lifts our spirits We can read the Big Bible- the book of nature- and commune with Creation and God's creatures. We can persist in deeds of kindness- among them just picking up the phone- you will surely find someone at home!

A musical friend suggested- small churches could hire the expertise of those like him who could help us be a virtual choir with our musician- so that choirs don't have to fall silent too much longer/

And maybe as we go along, we will come up with more ways to be together- safely.
If you want to see me, I could visit with you from my balcony-
Or maybe there is a screened porch or sunroom where we could be socially distant.

Endurance does not mean being miserable. It means finding a way of living well now- feeling grief by times for what we've lost- but also seeking gifts, opportunities, possibilities in the midst of all.
What small thing can we do day by day to make our lives good? And how can we deepen in our relationship with God, our spiritual being? If we cannot **do** all we usually do, can we learn more about how to **be**?

And as Jan Richardson reminds us, waiting for Spirit, attending to Spirit is not just about God and me- It's about deeply desiring a better community, a community encompassing more than our inner circle, A community widening horizons beyond those we know, Certainly beyond those who look like and live like and believe like us.

Zoom church has invited us to look outward. Sunday by Sunday, we've had friends from Toronto and Ottawa and Dartmouth and Halifax and New Glasgow and Montreal join us- someone else just now is sending the Zoom link to a friend . Several are becoming regulars.
We've had family members who couldn't come home for holiday weekends Zooming in to attend church with their parents and other family. Our Zoom congregation is growing. Anyone who connects with us spiritually can show up- as can anyone who maybe finds it hard to make a physical trip to a church building.

Facebook live has been another way of looking outward- Sharing a spiritual message with people all over Canada and beyond, And again ministering with people who might not choose to attend church in person. We are going out beyond our circle, beyond our walls.

And of course Spirit always calls us forth in love of the world- especially those persons, those places most in need of love, healing, transformation. even in prayer for places we cannot go- Minneapolis, Atlanta, Places of pandemic- places reeling from violence- In prayer for Black people, indigenous people, for government leaders, In prayer for the ill and those taking care of them.

Pentecost sees visions and dreams, dreams for all. And waiting is fertile ground for fragile hope to take root, For visions to emerge, For dreams to echo in our souls.

"And so we wait" - and yet, as we wait, Spirit is already here, Drawing the circle wide and wider still
Amen

We Sing Draw the Circle Wide (Gordon Light) sung by Community of Christ, Brighton
<https://youtu.be/zBNQ3zA7uU>

Offertory Prayer *[thank you if you are finding ways to continue your offering to your church!]*
Generous God, as you have given us much , we give you what we can, not only of our money but of ourselves. Through us and our giving, may dry bones live, weary bodies dance, broken spirits mend and heal. In the name of the Beloved and the power of the Spirit. Amen.

Pentecost Prayer

God of mystery and surprise, we thank you for all the gifts of your Spirit,
so abundantly poured upon us .
We seek your inspiration and wisdom in all that we do, all that we are.
God of spirited community, we thank you for this and all churches.
Even as we remain apart, may we still treasure this community - finding it a source of warmth and compassion-
knowing that Love still travels from one house to another..
May we continue to cherish what we have , holding all our church friends in our hearts, giving thanks for what
has been-
And waiting for what will yet be.
God of dreams and visions, we may wonder where your dreams and visions are coming true-
As we endure this pandemic time and the loss and loneliness it brings,
As our trust may be shaken by times,
As we see continued acts of inhumanity on the news-
And see how far we are from a world equally safe and welcoming for all. Work through us and others, we pray,
to bring about your intentions of healing and new life for all.
God of transformation, we remember before you those known to us and those among us who are suffering
illness, loss or any other trouble,
And those who bear burdens known only to themselves and to you.
In a moment of silence we hold in love and light all who need our prayers:
May your Spirit breathe into them and into us all the healing, hope, and trust we need to live through
challenges and hardships, to deepen in faith and compassion, and to know that we are not alone but always
held in your love.
These and all the prayers of our hearts we offer in the name of Jesus- your Beloved -and the Spirit, our
companion and guide., as we say together the prayer shared by communities around the world and across the
ages: Our Father [or Mother or Creator] who art in heaven..

Announcements , Joys and Concerns venue for Tuesday group and Wed. Board confirmed as Zoom,
Jane's Facebook Live will be just Tues. Thurs and Friday this coming week.

Words of Parting and Blessing

Go forth to live in the Light, following the Way, burning bright with Spirit-energy. And may the Spirit weave us
into a holy people, welcoming the stranger, befriending the lonely, cherishing the little ones, honouring God's
creation , living God's visions and dreaming God's dreams.

Special Music We Rise Again

<https://youtu.be/Wuigee-AC-o>

Note- except for first part of Gathering words and the Jan Richardson Blessing, all prayers are by Jane Doull