

Spirit of Restlessness

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Acts 2: 1-21

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Pentecost/Memorial Day Eve

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1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. 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.

Acts 2: 1-21

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

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

But 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. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘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. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be

turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

After Easter, the disciples gathered together often, trying to make sense of life without Jesus. Sometimes they gathered behind locked doors in fear. Sometimes they met in familiar places, like their fishing boats, with a longing to return to that elusive state called "normal." Sometimes they came together to observe the rhythms of their religious life, the holy days and the prayers and the commemorations.

Together: it's often where we find God. And when we're struggling to find God, together is how we hold on.

Together is also a place where we can become stuck.

Together can become sufficient, providing comfort without challenge, adequacy but not abundance. Together can become safe for the sake of staying in, to the neglect of going out. Together can become authoritative, a judgment of "them vs. us," a closed community into which nothing (and no one) new is invited or imagined.

When Pentecost day began, the disciples were all together in one place.

When Pentecost day ended, the disciples had gone out from their one place. Together multiplied. New togethers formed. New dreams sparked. New songs arose. New witnesses testified. New generosity flowed.

And the original together—the disciples who had been trying to hold on one day at a time, trying to make sense of their new normal? They changed. "All together" became their call, not just their comfort.ⁱ

UCC Daily Devotional writer Rachel Hackenberg's attention to togetherness—in its goodness and in its limits—in its holding on for strength and its holding on for denial---in its welcoming inclusion and its closed off exclusion—invites us to see what the Pentecost Spirit does for us and to us. We are drawn together as one body regardless of our cultures, our languages, our diversity. We are dispersed and sent out into the world to be the gospel good news.

On the Pentecost that became the birthday of the Church, thousands of Jews from 16 different locations, 16 different languages or dialects, were gathered together in Jerusalem, having come on a pilgrimage to commemorate the day that the Jewish people had received the Law through Moses. and to give thanks for the harvest. As these people were crowded into the streets, Peter and the disciples, along with 120 believers, were crowded into an upstairs room, following the final instructions from Jesus just ten days before in the moment before his ascension, "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

On that morning, the sound of a sudden rush of an intense wind blew through the house, startling and surprising everyone with its powerful, dramatic, invisible energy that was life-changing, but not destructive nor dangerous. The sound sent them out into the staring, startled crowds. Distinct flame tongues of fire danced then among the disciples and the believers, until a tongue rested on each of them. Filled now with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. Inspired by the Spirit, 16 languages unknown by the those who had been waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, were suddenly fluently and passionately spoken in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

While some questioned the morning sobriety of those empowered by the Holy Spirit, 3000 became followers that day. 3000 people who didn't even speak the same language, but in one breath, as God's Spirit was poured out, each one of them had the united experience of hearing God's Word in their own language. The breath of God and the Word of God united those gathered, forming them into the people of God.ⁱⁱ

"What does this mean?" asked some of the amazed and perplexed crowd.

It means we are all one. God calls us to be one. God created us as one race, the human race. As Paul will one day write, "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." Pentecost makes us family. We are all brothers and sisters together in Christ Jesus, we all drink of the one Spirit.

"What does this mean?" asked some of the amazed and perplexed crowd.

It means the gift of Pentecost is the power to cope with life more than adequately and with joy independent of circumstances. We do this best together. This gift is what it should mean to be the Church.

Christmas is when it all starts. Jesus is born and God with us, Emmanuel, is here at last! Easter is when we learn that the Church cannot die, it survives, it lives on! But it is at Pentecost that we learn that we are all in this together, that humans can do the work, that God and Gospel are bigger than divisions of language and geography, and that we are resilient. Pentecost is when we find out that we are not alone on this. Pentecost is when we get one of the greatest gifts of all—the Holy Spirit and the love of Christians beyond our own rooms is made known.ⁱⁱⁱ

"What does this mean?" asked some of the amazed and perplexed crowd.

"What does this mean?" we ask in 2023 when mass shootings have become commonplace, when politics plays games with Social Security payments, when our world is increasingly threatened by climate change and its doubters.

"What does this mean?" we ask on Memorial Day weekend as we honor the ultimate sacrifice of veterans who fought for, died for, our freedom and safety.

It means we hear the Spirit speaking of peace—peace that lays down the violence of the guns, peace that causes those with leadership power to care most about the people they serve, peace that puts the care and healing of our climate over selfish greed, peace that turns swords into plowshares. Our world needs peace. We need to be on the frontlines of peace. The breath of God is for all, and it grieves the heart of God that anyone could view someone else's life, could view the goodness of creation, as insignificant or dispensable.

It means we are stirred by the Spirit of Gentleness, the Spirit of Restlessness, so that we are together multiplied, that new togethers are formed, new dreams sparked, new songs arise, new witnesses testify, new generosity flows, new love is poured out and new peace reigns. Amen.

ⁱ Rachel Hackenberg, https://www.ucc.org/daily-devotional/daily_devotional_all_together/

ⁱⁱ <https://tvcog.org/sermons/pass-the-peace-of-pentecost-please/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Rev. Jake Miles Joseph, <https://firstchurchguilford.org/sermon/a-progressive-pentecost-the-united-church-of-christ/>