

Pentecost, Acts 2:1-21
Rev. Kimberly Glenn
May 24, 2026

Generous and loving God, send us today the light of your Holy Spirit. Teach us, inspire us and then lead us in the Way of Christ. Amen.

Today is the Sunday of Pentecost. It is a day that I, for years, especially when I was a child, looked forward to a big birthday cake being served at coffee hour. I mean who doesn't secretly love cake!? Especially when it is covered in yummy icing.

Pentecost is a Sunday that was, in those days, always celebrated as the birthday of the church, and that is true in a way. But what really happened on that day in Jerusalem was a whole lot more important and impactful than a birthday party. It was a moment in time that made people of different cultures, different skin colors and backgrounds, aware that they are people intended by God to be bound together. God intends for peoples' various gifts and skills to be woven together in such a way that a foundation for a peaceable kingdom can be constructed.

When you think of Pentecost that way, you can see that moments like that happen fairly often. There are moments in human history, and even within our lifetimes, that seem to usher us toward a similar kind of unity. That feeling of comradery is the same feeling of comradery I and many others felt in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Natural disasters can act as a similar catalyst. Hurricane Isabelle raged through and ravished Richmond, a place I and many others called home. The Northern Neck was terrorized by a tornado not long ago. When moments like that happen you remember them. You remember with fondness and a sense of longing the humanity that came out in everyone as they reached out to help one another get through it all. At that time of rebuilding and recovery, our diversity and differences did not matter.

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Pentecost in Jerusalem was a moment kind of like that. Not a moment of response to tragedy, but a moment where diverse people were gathered together for a common purpose. These were Jewish people from different cultures and regions of the world who were all gathered together for an annual harvest celebration known as Shavuot. There would have been thousands gathered there. Shavuot was celebrated fifty days after Passover. After this Shavuot festival, the Greek name Pentecost meaning fifty days came to be associated with it. Instead of the Passover, it is celebrated on the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus. That there were a whole lot of people gathered that day was significant and could not have been a coincidence. It was when they were all gathered that God intentionally sent the Holy Spirit in among them. That's when the Holy Spirit suddenly appeared, coming in like the "rush of a violent wind."

After that wind filled the room, the people, who were from many different tribes and many different nations were suddenly able to hear and understand the same God-sent message. On that day, God breathed new life into their world. This story is about God's Spirit awakening people who were frightened and uncertain about their faith to discover newfound gifts inside themselves. Through the Spirit, they were given a new sense of courage, compassion, and wisdom. They were given the gift of hearing what God wanted from them. They were given the gift of understanding how they were to use those gifts in harmony to build what has come to be known as the church. It was a new church... with a new sense of faith. These churches were built to act as the body of Christ in the world.

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At Pentecost the Spirit brought about the unity the people needed to thrive. At the same time the Spirit at Pentecost empowered the unique gifts that each of them had. The Spirit did not erase their differences but instead harmonized their differing gifts by opening up communication between them. The Holy Spirit will harmonize the differences between us and bring us into unity, too, if we allow the Spirit to enter into us.

Not everybody lets the Spirit in, even though God's grace and Spirit is freely given. It is hard to believe anyone would turn away such an awesome, free gift. But we know from this story that some people resisted or rejected the Spirit. Unfortunately, some people still do. Maybe the people in the story who resisted thought what they were sensing was a fabrication, that the Spirit was imagined, not really there at all.

It is true that the Spirit can be intoxicating but sensing it's presence is not the result of intoxication. Scripture tells us that some sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine." The Spirit fills every life that is willing to receive it — just as breath fills lungs or wind fills sails. The Spirit filled the apostle Peter on that day of Pentecost and he rose up to lead the disciples into a new way of being in community with the divine. Peter, who had denied three times that he ever knew Jesus, was empowered by that same Spirit and rose up. Miraculously, Peter finally acknowledged and embraced the gift of leadership that Jesus had been trying for three years to convince him that he had.

Peter's empowerment that day is why this church is here. The Spirit filling and leading Jesus and Peter is why we are here today. The Spirit is here for us today, if we open ourselves up to it. We do not need to wait for the "rush of a violent wind." Without

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a violent wind, the Spirit ignited the hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They said about their encounter with Jesus, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" It was that same Spirit that ignited the flame in them.

I think all of us know of people who have discovered the flame within them. Some people come alive in spirit when they offer hospitality, some when they provide meals for the needy or care for the wounds of those who've been hurt. Some come alive in spirit when they build things, or create beauty in art or music. Some come alive when they teach children and teenagers. The point is that God pours the Spirit out freely so that the Spirit of God's love is ignited. The giver and the receiver both benefit. It takes all kinds of gifts of the Spirit to form a solid foundation for the community that God wants us to build. The Spirit is here today, seeking to empower us.

The Spirit of Pentecost did not fall on a single individual that day. The Spirit fell on a diverse group of people who at first did not know how to communicate with each other. The Spirit brought them together. The Spirit empowered them to work together. And the Spirit can empower all of us to work together. Let's do that. And when we do, we can celebrate with a party and a cake because the Church will not simply be remembering its birthday. The Church will be alive.

Grace Church will be alive with people discovering that they matter. Alive with people discovering that God can use them. Alive with a people whose hearts are set on fire with the love of Christ. And maybe that fire begins not with a rushing violent wind, but with one person saying yes. Yes, I will serve. Yes, I will teach. Yes, I will encourage.

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Yes, I will invite. Yes, I will help build something life-giving. Yes, I will trust that God can use even me.

So let us not wait for some dramatic moment like the rushing of a violent wind. The same Spirit that hovered over creation, that raised Jesus from the dead, that shook Jerusalem awake, is still moving among God's people now. When you get a nudge that something needs to be done, maybe that nudge means that you need to find the courage to do it. Together we can bring more life and vitality to Grace Church, more life and vitality to our community. If you feel nudged to bring young families back to Grace Church, be the one to get that started. If you feel nudged to start a camp for kids in the summer, be the one to help get it organized. If you feel nudged to make sure everyone receives information about the church, be the one to help make those connections. If you'd like to see people come to church from RW-C, be the one to help arrange it. Let the Holy Spirit inspire you. You can do this. We can do this. Let that spark, that nudge in us turn into a flame by working together with other people who have sensed that same nudge.

The Spirit does not fill perfect people, it fills willing people. So let the Spirit stir in you. Let the spark grow brighter. And let us go from this place ready not only to celebrate Pentecost — but to live it, because if enough ordinary people say yes to the Spirit of Christ, the world itself begins to change. Amen.