

“Ripples of the Spirit” Sixth in the Series “Ripples: Draw the Circle Wide”

Acts 2:1-13; Numbers 11:24-25; Acts 1:6-8

May 24, 2026 (The Day of Pentecost)

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Acts 2:1-13

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.’

Numbers 11:24-25

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

Acts 1:6-8

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Sermon

Writer and former Episcopal Rector Andrew Thayer says this about Pentecost:

“Pentecost is frequently described as the moment the Holy Spirit arrived – as though God’s Spirit had been largely absent from the world until Acts 2, waiting somewhere offstage for the official launch of the Church.”

“The Spirit of God is there long before Pentecost. In the beginning, in Genesis, ‘the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.’ The world begins not with divine absence but divine nearness.”

“Later in Genesis . . . Adam is sculpted from clay, but the figure remains lifeless until God breathes into it . . . breath, wind, spirit . . . Humanity has never existed apart from the Spirit of God. Every lungful of air arrives already charged with divine intimacy.” Throughout the Old Testament, “it is the Spirit that animates and enlivens.”

“So when the Spirit of God violently blows back into the life of the Church at Pentecost, it is less of a church birthday and more of a family reunion.”

“And maybe that is part of what Pentecost reveals. Not that God suddenly decided to enter the world, but that humanity finally began recognizing the Spirit had been there from the beginning – moving through creation, through prophets and poets, through frightened disciples and ordinary people trying to remain faithful.”

It was a real “family reunion” on that first Day of Pentecost. “Devout Jews from every nation under heaven” had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost . . . also called “The Feast of Weeks.” This feast occurred 50 days after Passover. It was at the time of the Passover that Jesus had been crucified. Perhaps some of the same Jews who were in town for Passover were back for Pentecost . . . The Feast of Weeks.

After Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, he visited with his disciples. He breathed on them the Holy Spirit during one of his visits. He told them to wait in Jerusalem. He gathered with them just prior to his

ascension into heaven and said: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

And so they waited. They waited 10 days. As we have heard in our scripture reading from Acts 2, the Holy Spirit did indeed show up with power. It was epic. “All of them (120 followers of Jesus including all of the apostles), were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” What was being said in all those languages. The Spirit-filled followers of Jesus were “speaking about God’s amazing deeds of power.”

The Apostle Peter then gave a sermon, which I assume the Holy Spirit continued to interpret for the many listeners who spoke many different languages. He proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus for their salvation. “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and asked: “What should we do?” Peter replied: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

“So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 persons were added.” Talk about a ripple effect. What happened next was that those 3,000 people went back to their homes, some in Jerusalem but many from all those countries and regions I struggled to pronounce when I read Acts 2 at the beginning of the service. They went out into Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Having received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they repented and were baptized, they became witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin to the ends of the earth.

The ripple effect of Pentecost continues today. It continues today as the Holy Spirit moves among, within, and through us and other believers.

It all sounds so exciting, but I must confess to you today that at least right now in my life I find the Holy Spirit to be exhausting.

Yes, the Holy Spirit comforts and advocates and breathes life, but it seems the Holy Spirit is always up to something and wanting us to be involved. And not just in easy stuff. Go there. Do this. Love that person. Help those people. Be compassionate. Show the love of Jesus. Look at every person as a child of God . . . as Jesus himself, and act accordingly. It’s exhausting.

The Holy Spirit calls us, pushes us, prods us to both tell and show the Gospel of Jesus. It’s already difficult enough to tell others about Jesus and his love, to call others to repentance, to invite others to follow Jesus; it’s even more difficult to show his love in consistent ways and in complicated

situations. It is exhausting. It is complicated. It is sometimes thankless. You know what this is like.

I believe this is when the Holy Spirit – the one who is also our comforter and advocates – says: “Rest. Let me minister to you. Let me breathe on you anew and afresh.” But then the pushing and prodding begins again. The Spirit can be relentless.

It struck me this week that the Holy Spirit is also our interpreter. So often there is misunderstanding and misinterpretation when we try to follow the example of the Apostles – to speak of Jesus and to live as he lived. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak other languages and allowed the hearers to understand the Gospel in their own language. Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit to bring understanding when we speak and act and when others speak and act. We need the miracle of understanding among us and around us and within us.

When we serve others who are different from us, we need the Holy Spirit to bring us and them understanding. We need understanding of complex situations and people. We need the Holy Spirit for others to comprehend the love of Christ we seek to convey and we need the Holy Spirit to show us the way. We need the Holy Spirit to help us know ourselves, our brokenness, and our sin.

And so, today, my earnest prayer is: “Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Fall afresh on us. Renew us. Light the fire again within us. Comfort us where we feel we’ve been hurt. Renew us in our exhaustion. Continue to use us to be part of the ripple effect in the lives of others to whom you call us. Help us to repent, to believe, and to be open to the Spirit’s powerful work in our lives . . . every day . . . in every way.

Let us remember that the Holy Spirit is present. As Rev Andrew Thayer said: “Humanity has never existed apart from the Spirit of God. Every lungful of air arrives already charged with divine intimacy. The Spirit continues to move through creation, through prophets and poets, through frightened disciples and ordinary people trying to remain faithful.” Amen.