

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Today is Pentecost, one of the biggest days in the church year along with Christmas and Easter. The Jewish people also celebrated, and celebrate Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, which for them comes 50 days after the Passover and commemorates the Israelites escape from Egypt. Remember how the angel of death passed over the homes which were marked with the blood of the lamb, the journey through the wilderness to the promised land? Jewish people from all over the ancient world would gather in Jerusalem to celebrate.

So now we are celebrating. Have you noticed all the red today? Red dresses, shirts, ties, our vestments and my stole, even my clerical shirt though you cannot see it right at the moment. Lots of red today, red reminding you of the “tongues, as of fire” that appeared among and on those disciples gathered that very first Pentecost. Fifty days after the very first Easter.

Imagine the surprise that morning, all these folks from all over the ancient world, hearing their own languages. Maybe expecting to see a neighbor or at least someone from their neck of the woods. What do they see instead? Galileans, fishermen among others, from northern Israel, and all of them talking about God’s mighty acts.

Peter elaborates that 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.” Visions and dreams, slaves, men and women, and God continues “I will pour out my Spirit.”

Jewish people and proselytes from virtually everywhere, hearing about God’s deeds of power in their own languages, and the Spirit poured out on all flesh. Distinctions between people suddenly done away with, God not just for the Jewish people, but for Gentiles as well. And in a short time, relatively speaking, these followers of Jesus go from being a small band of Jews and proselytes to an empire-wide, then to a world-wide phenomenon. Jews, Greeks, city and country people, men and women, slaves and free, educated and uneducated, joined together, not always in total agreement, but devoted to Jesus, to God, to service to others in Jesus’ name.

The sound of a mighty wind, tongues of fire. Folks from all over the Roman Empire hearing their own native tongues spoken by Galileans. The promise of the Spirit poured out on all flesh, young and old, including slaves, men and women. But there is even more to the story, it goes on, over 3,000 people were baptized that day.

And so we have disagreements then, disagreements now, some trivial, some over deeply held convictions, but most of those who are homeless, or hungry, or hurting, could care less about doctrine and dogma. So consider that Pentecost invites us to look beyond labels we often use to set ourselves apart from others and to look at our God given unity in Jesus and his ministry. So what do we receive from the

Spirit? How about a sense of urgency to act, to hear, to see signs of God's presence. Although we may not do so in languages we do not speak, we have opportunities to share our stories, to participate in acts of ministry that speak to people where and as they are. When those to whom we are sent want to know why we have come, the Spirit equips us to explain that the message and ministry of Jesus do not belong to just a small select group of people, but to the world. The Spirit equips us and empowers us and any success that follows belongs to God.

Now we face challenges and disappointments even as we journey in faith, because we long for nothing less than the fullness of life for all creation, knowing that goodness endures even in the face of all that happens. The hope given us by the Spirit points us beyond our own limitations to the God who claims us, to Christ who saves and remains with us, to the Spirit who sustains and renews us.

God has sent his Spirit to us, and as we accept the guidance and the gift of the Spirit so we participate in Jesus' ministry where and as we are, living in unity with Christ, the Father and the Spirit, here and now. Jesus is the revelation of God and we bear witness to him.

Now today we end the season of Easter as we started, with absolute dependence upon God. Only God can bring life from death and only God can send the Spirit. We, you and I along with countless brothers and sisters throughout the world, serve others in his name, his presence in and around us. Sometimes we are pretty timid in our discipleship, but by the grace of God, our discipleship becomes the very work of God as the Spirit is poured out upon us.

Think of it brothers and sisters, your presence and participation in ministry for others, and with others around the world, reveals the presence of God! Small acts of acceptance, friendship and forgiveness make it easier for those with faith, and for those who long for faith, to envision a future with hope, to live and serve together as we experience the ministry and presence of Jesus! Union with God does not come solely when life is over and the world is hushed and still, instead the presence and gifts of the spirit draw us into the embrace of God in every deed or word that points to what we receive in Jesus! AMEN