

May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength, and our Redeemer. Amen

We are now at the end of Easter season for this year. This is Pentecost Sunday. Today, we celebrate the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples to give them the blessings and gifts they will need to carry on the ministry of Jesus Christ, and to spread the Good news to all the world.

But what is Pentecost all about?

Pentecost has its origins in the Jewish tradition. Pentecost, in the reading from Acts 2, which Jim Smith shared with us, speaks about the people of Israel from all over the known world, gathering for a festival to mark fifty days after the Passover. This was an opportunity for people to come together for a moment of connection, a time to visualize all of Israel as being collected together, if only in a metaphoric way, but still connected, so they might share their stories. The Jewish people had become a people dispersed across all the known world, yet they were not isolated, nor alienated from each other. Every year at Pentecost, there would be a “newness in their journey” because they were blessed with the opportunity to share their stories, as a people, united over distance and time. It is within the midst of this festival that the disciples are gathered once again to find a path forward in the mission Jesus left for them . It is into their midst that the Holy Spirit comes and empowers Jesus’ disciples to go about the birthing of the new church. The Spirit of God, the Paraclete, was the teacher sent to complete what Jesus had begun and to lead them into Jesus’ abiding love

For the disciples, Pentecost is a liminal moment. As the disciples, they had been waiting, just as Jesus had directed them. Waiting for the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, the One which Jesus promised to send. But why would the Spirit only come after Jesus had ascended to be with the Creator, in heaven? They did not understand why, but they knew this was Jesus’ command, and they were abiding in Him, waiting for the Spirit of God to appear.

For us, Pentecost is a time to shift our gaze from looking back through the scripture readings and hearing yet again the stories of Jesus ministering to the poor, the sick, the outcasts, and the sinners, and moving forward in service to others. We have heard the stories about Jesus, and now Jesus has ascended from our sight, and we need to look forward to having the truths of our faith reaffirmed, and now using what we have learned. It is time for us to step out in faith, to act wisely, to be just, to love, to be kind, and to walk humbly with our Creator. We go from being a band of followers, just like the disciples, to being witnesses of God's love for all creation. And we must always acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is with us. Pentecost is our reassurance of God's promise that we will have eternal life, and that we have it, abundantly.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth which comes along side us, accompanies us, helps us, consoles us, and guides us. The Holy Spirit advocates on our behalf before God, and guides us into testifying to the 'truth' of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit's job to remind us of what Jesus has taught. To remind us especially in those times when grief, fear, or forgetfulness distances us from God's love. The Spirit enters these places of loss, abandonment, and wonder, and empowers us to be witnesses. We are empowered to bear witness to the love of God for all creation, and to do this for all the world.

Pentecost is God's call for the Church to live into the full power of the Spirit. It is God's call for us to see, feel, touch, and love all of God's creation. The psalm appointed for today, Psalm 104, tells us that God delights in His Creation. God created all the wonders of creation, from the tiniest things to the amazing creatures of the sea, the land, and the air, and all the wonders of this planet and the known universe. God sustains all of creation and it is good. God renews the face of the earth and as Genesis chapter 1 we are told repeatedly, "And God saw that it was good."

God did one more amazing thing, he created us in his own image. If God delights in all creation, then God also delights in us. Through the teachings of Jesus Christ,

we are in true relationship with our Creator. And we are guided in that relationship with God and all creation, by the Holy Spirit.

The people of Israel gathered fifteen days after Passover to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, also called the festival of Weeks. They shared their stories and in sharing their stories they found connection with each other. They were a people dispersed across the earth, yet they were a people united in the common bond of relationship to one another, and to the Creator.

We, too, are God's people dispersed across the face of the earth. As Christians, we have been given the mission to spread the Good News about God, his love for all creation, and his wish that all peoples will come to know and love him as much as he loves all that has been given for our care and stewardship. Simply put, we need to tell our story. Our individual stories are unique to each of us, alone. My story and your story, though rooted in our relationship with the Creator, will be different. Individually, I am the only one who can tell my story. I am the only one who has first-hand, intimate knowledge of what God is doing in my life. But I can share my witness with others, and to be witness to what my relationship with God looks like, feels like, loves like, and is like. Isn't that neat? It's my story, and no one else's.

The story of what God does for us is as individual as we are unique from everyone else. While we are telling our story, the Spirit is at work in the hearts and minds of those who hear us, affirming the truth we tell about how God abides in us, because we are his own, and because our love for God is apparent in everything we say, do, or share with those around us

The Spirit of God, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Advocate, the One promised by Jesus, remains in the world, seeking to bless us in everything we do. Can we trust in the Spirit of God to lead us? I think so.

As we move into the next phases of our discernment process here on Salt Spring Island, where do you think the Spirit is about to lead us? Are the winds of change blowing through us as God's people? I believe they are. I am listening for the sound of the Spirit to guide me in my life and to guide us direction in our

discernment for a new spiritual leader. May God bless us as we move forward in our spiritual journey.

Amen.