



P E N T E C O S T

This is May 23, 2021 It is Pentecost and the bells have rung again!

On behalf of our family of faith at Community United Church of Christ, Medford, WI,
welcome to this time of worship!

“No matter who you are or where you are on your life’s journey, you are welcome here!”

To all of you across the internet and across this room, welcome! How fitting it is to join in worship in person today, after more than a year of being distanced from each...on Pentecost! Pentecost is traditionally known as the “birthday of the church!” The children have met at 9:30 for Faith Formation Time on Zoom and in person! It is fitting to say that we are born again today into a new beginning on our faith journey together.

Let’s begin with this **Call to Worship**: On this day of celebration, as we worship, may God pour out the great Spirit upon us. May the power and promise of that day long ago, renew the church. May our hearts be set afire with enthusiasm and may our lives show forth energy and courage as we live the good news of new life. ~Call to Worship, Confession & Benediction for Pentecost were written by Rev. Ellis Arnold.

Let’s spend a few moments in reflection and confession: Knowing that we rarely take time to listen to our still-speaking God... and like the people of Jerusalem long ago, we often misunderstand the Spirit’s movement among us...in the silence of this moment, let us draw near to God and listen. [silence]
Let us pray: Spirit of God, you come to us as a powerful wind — but we have shut the door and have bolted it, attempting to keep you out. You descend on us as tongues of fire — but we run away, afraid of being consumed. You give us gifts beyond our ability— but we squander them, we hide them and we say, “Not today,” or “How can one person make a difference?” or “Oh no, not me, oh God.” Forgive our feebleness. Break open the doors of our resistance. Let the fire of your Spirit dance within each of us and give us courage and faith to claim your call for our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Hear these words of Assurance: Hear the good news! God’s Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, and we have been made one. We are no longer scattered or divided but gathered together to build up God’s kingdom on this earth. Thanks be to God!

Let’s turn to someone near us now and wave a greeting of peace
and call someone or text them later and say, “**Peace be with you.**”

Mike (online) and Jerry (in-person) will read the Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

This is from the Message interpretation of the Bible by Eugene Peterson: “A Sound Like a Strong Wind”

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning, there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn’t for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, “Aren’t these all Galileans? How come we’re hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?”

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; visitors from Mesopotamia, (messo-po-TAY-me-uh) Judea, (joo-DEE-uh) and Cappadocia, (Cap-uh-doe-see-uh) Pontus and Asia, Phrygia (fridge-ee-uh) and Pamphylia (Pam-fill-ee-uh) Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; immigrants from Rome, both Jews and converts; even Cretans and Arabs!

“They’re speaking our languages, describing God’s mighty works!” Their heads were spinning; they couldn’t make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: “What’s going on here?” Others joked, “They’re drunk on cheap wine.”

That’s when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: “Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren’t drunk as some of you suspect. They haven’t had time to get drunk—it’s only nine o’clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

“In the Last Days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters; your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams. When the time comes, I’ll pour out my Spirit on those who serve me, men and women both, and they’ll prophesy. I’ll set wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billowing smoke, the sun turning black and the moon blood-red, before the Day of the Lord arrives, the Day tremendous and marvelous; and whoever calls out for help to me, God, will be saved.”

My Message today is entitled: “*Back and Forth*”

Please pray with me: Holy One of many names, we come before you, knowing that you are where we are and you have been where we have been, and you already are where we will be going forth from this day. Oh, great Invisible One, let us each be carriers and sharers of the love and grace that you so freely give to us. We pray in your name, Creator, Redeemer and Comforter. Amen.

The spring harvest festival was going on in Jerusalem that day, when scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit came to the disciples of Jesus. Still not forgetting all that had come to pass since the death and resurrection of Jesus and still a little fearful for their own lives... “²... suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and all of them began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (That’s from the NRSV.)

Now, that would take your breath away, wouldn’t it? Realizing that everyone in the crowd of visitors speaking in their own language, was enabled to understand what was being said about “the wonderful works of God.” The disciples of Jesus were empowered to be bold, articulate witnesses of all that Jesus had done.

I sense a parallel. It is spring in Wisconsin and it’s almost as though a festival is going on here in Medford, too! Have you noticed that there are more people out and about? Brat fries are being set up. Visitors from other states are passing through town and motorcycles are whizzing by? We who are still not forgetting all that has happened this past year and who are still a little fearful for those who may still be vulnerable to the disease that took away our “normal lives” are “not-so-suddenly” faced with the grace of being able to speak with one another again, face to face.

Today’s scripture has led me to think about the wind that is thankfully *dying down* here: that wind carrying the virus, that is...and the wind that has blown us each into our own little corners of whatever city and space we call “home.” We have listened to tongues afire with the language of hatred and mistrust. We have clearly heard clearly the language of fear and racism. We have listened to and have personally experienced the language of grief and dread. We have waded through the muddy language of misunderstanding. Today’s scripture challenges us to speak with new tongues, in new *languages*, in this time of transitioning back and forward.

This is the day that nudges us speak to another in the mother-tongue of compassion and care, in the father-tongue of encouragement and peace. Let’s practice the language of “Yes, I can do this!” and “How can we help?” and “How can we make our world a better place?”

Knowing very well, that we all have been shaken and that we all have been forced to live differently, have you asked, “Where is God in all of this?” Maybe it’s time to pile some hope onto our plates and take note of how God is creating something new among us, right before our very eyes.

Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, who we have named the Comforter, the Advocate, the Breath of God, the Spirit of Gentleness, the Spirit of Restlessness. This same Spirit enabled the disciples to go and spread the Gospel. That same Spirit is here in our midst today, on this day which some call the

birthday of the church with the gift that we have been wishing for: being able to gather together again. Whether we are joining in worship online, or joining together by reading the script, or are joining here in person, we all truly have come home for Pentecost this year!

Celebrate today. Celebrate quietly by giving thanks for God's faithfulness, for the *way of love* that Jesus teaches us. Celebrate his promise to send the Holy Spirit and whisper thanks that he kept that promise.

During a recent commencement address, John Legend told the graduates, "We all do better when we all do better." As you know, a commencement ceremony does not signal an ending. Today is the day that we will remember, as if we are all were graduating into a world that is brimming over with anticipation for us to do better than we have ever done before.

It will take throwing away impatience. It will only happen if we whisk away any leftover resentments. It will mean that we will need to bottle up our fears and put them on the shelf. Only then will we come to the realization that it is time to enjoy this new life together.

As we look into the history of today's scripture, the "baby" church was continuing to grow. The people who followed Jesus were getting used to a new way of life and they were inviting others to join them. It was not an easy task, but, because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit, because they were courageous and took on the challenges they faced, we are here today reading and hearing the story.

I pray that we, who have come to gather for worship either online or in person will go out with the wind of the Spirit at our backs and the fire of the Spirit in our hearts to forge a new and better, a kinder and more caring community on the outside of these walls. Think of it as a new calling for us **to be** the carriers of that wind and fire of Pentecost.

We are in this life together. We have been commanded by Jesus to love one another and we are responsible for one another. We can deny one another's love. We can walk away and ignore one another's needs. We can, now that we can, gather here on Sundays and leave our faith at the door...**or**...we can, as we have so well learned over the course of this pandemic-distanced year, face up to the fact that the church is not just inside of these walls and it NEVER WAS.

Want to grow this church? Want to attract new members? Well, just so you know, we have welcomed new members: Lori and Dennis Grambort and Rebecca Schneiderman. People from all over the state of WI, from CA, AL and NC...just to name a few...have joined in our online recorded worship services, Page Turners book club and Cerebration group. Friends have invited friends. Curiosity has drawn others. People who may never have stepped a foot through these doors, have, in the privacy of their homes, joined in worship and now depend on it each week. The numbers of hours people have spent watching our YouTube Worship videos has been amazing!

It is time again to tell my favorite story of the man who was unfortunate enough to be in a torrential rainstorm. It rained and rained for days and finally, flood waters came up over the windows of the first floor of his house. He managed to get up to the second story and sat and waited for the rain to stop. A friend came by in a boat and wanted him to crawl out the window, get in the boat and go to safety. He said "No, I know that God is with me and will save me." The waters grew higher and higher. Soon, he was forced to go out and sit on his roof. A rescue boat came by. The man said, "No, thanks, God will provide for me." More rain came; the water rose higher and he was soon up clinging to the chimney. A helicopter came by, lowered a ladder and tried to talk him into getting on board.

The man insisted that God would provide for him. It was not long before the man drowned and came before God in heaven. He said to God "Why did I die, why didn't you save me? I believed in you! I trusted you!" God answered: You may have believed, but you didn't hear me. I sent two boats and a helicopter and you didn't get it!

And here we are, still waiting for God to send help and to produce something amazing, when the truth is that God has clearly put the "sign" **back there** and has brought more light and truth **forth** right in front of us! We can't miss it. We must not ever again let a church building confine our faith. "Being the church" requires praising God together and doing good things wherever we are, whenever we can and all the while... speaking only the language of love. Everyone will understand it.

As far as I am concerned, we can never go **back** exactly to the "way we were" and expect better things to come forth. Watch and listen as the body and spirit of this church becomes new, as together,

we go forth from this day rejoicing that there can be no going **back**. **I take a deep breath... and let it out!**

Time for Prayer:

Let's spend a few moments in silent prayer.

Let us pray: Great and glorious God. You constantly remind us of your holy presence by those things we can see and those that we can only feel, if we would just take the time to notice. As elusive as the wind, as powerful as fire, we give thanks that, even though the Spirit evades our capture, yet manages to touch, nudge, comfort us just the same.

Grant us the peace and presence of mind to pause and feel the wind which is your breath on our faces. Help us to realize that you not only breathed in our first breath, but you continue to breathe life into each one of us every moment of every day. Let the fire of your love burn brightly through us as we strive to trust steadily in you, hope unswervingly and love extravagantly. This we ask in the name of Jesus who calls us to renew our calling to be the Church today. Hear now the prayers we hold in our hearts as we lift our prayers for those who have asked us to pray for them and for those who never would ask... **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but, deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen**

Solo, Pastor Mary Jo: "Here I am, Lord"

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry. All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save. I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.
2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain. I have wept for love of them.
They turn away. I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.
3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame. I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save. Finest bread I will provide 'till their hearts be satisfied. I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send? Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

Song #, © Words: Dan Scuttee; Music arrangement, Craig Courtney:

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A Time of Intention and Thanks: Many thanks to all who, by your loving and by your giving, have made possible the loving ministry of Jesus to continue in our community. Let's dedicate the gifts given in person, through the mail and by electronic means. Oh God of love, we offer you our time, talents and treasures, knowing that you have set before us more to do than we have yet imagined! Bless these gifts and receive them with our thanks and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Benediction: Let our intent be inspired as we remember ... *That Pentecost day, with the Spirit in the air, the disciples were suddenly clear about their stories and their intention to share their stories with the world.*

*Maybe it was the rushing wind that had jolted them out of complacency. (Will it jolt us, too?!)
Maybe it was the dancing tongues of fire that landed on each one igniting them to action. (Will it ignite us?)*

*Maybe it was the hope that comes with having the Companion, the Advocate, nearby. (Near us, too!)
Whichever it was, the disciples found their authentic voices and soon after discovered that they had a story to share with the world. (We do, too!) Go forth into this day, with the Spirit in the air, to share your stories of God's love with the world. Go forth into the world in the name of God, the one who creates you; go in the name of the Jesus who shows us the way; and go in the name of the Holy Spirit,
who is with us now and always.*

Peace be with you and be safe!

You will find this recorded service at uccmedford.org

Click on "media."

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