

## **“The Story the Spirit Writes”**

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bjork  
Bay Shore Community Congregational Church – June 5, 2022  
Lesson: Acts 2:1-8

Come, Holy Spirit... Fill us anew with your inspiring power. Sweep through our lives and invigorate our souls. May your living presence be felt in this community, in this place, in this time together, and in our daily lives. Speak to us in new ways, in new languages, and give us ears to hear your word to us today. Amen.

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All summer long we are continuing our sermon series, *Getting Our Story Straight*, in which we are exploring some of the important stories of our faith tradition that we all should know well and reflect upon regularly. And today is one of my favorites!

I love Pentecost! In addition to Christmas and Easter, it is one of the most important holidays of our faith tradition because this is the day that we commemorate the birth of the church and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the world. So, Happy Birthday, church!

This is a day to celebrate! And it is a day to honor our call to be the church together – a call that began with Jesus when he handed over his mission and ministry to those who followed him, calling them to form communities of faith, and to continue to spread the good news of God’s Reign – to teach, to heal, to inspire, to love as God would have them love.

This is the day when we remember and celebrate that the Holy Spirit showed up in their communities of faith and continues to show up in ours.

On that first Pentecost, the disciples had gathered together for the Feast of Weeks, a Jewish harvest festival. It was something they probably celebrated every year. But this time was different. This time it became something new, as God did a new thing among them, and they we’re enlivened, emboldened, inspired, filled, and overwhelmed by this fresh experience of God’s Spirit.

Like a rush of wind that sweeps across the land, howling, rustling trees, kicking up sand, messing up your hair, snapping at the fabric of your windbreaker, the Holy Spirit blows open the doors of our hearts and makes itself at home.

Like flames, like fire, crackling and popping, energetic, consuming, cleansing, burning hot and bright, lighting up the darkness, the Holy Spirit ignites us and gets cookin’.

I love these vivid images of wind and fire.

There are other images for God's Spirit in the biblical text that are gentler, less invasive, less all-consuming and intense – the Spirit descends like a dove, the Spirit warms hearts, the Spirit speaks in stillness and quiet. Those are equally important images.

But today is Pentecost.

And like wind, like fire, the Holy Spirit of Pentecost is powerful, a force not to be ignored, a reminder that yes, God is alive, God is here, God is active – not in some other place, not just in the memories of the past, not just in some glimpse of the future – but right here, right now, in this gathering. In you. In me. In us.

Though we hear and remember this Spirit story of the first disciples, it is our Spirit story too... one that is still being written.

This is the story of the church swept up in the Spirit. This is the story of the church on fire with the love of God.

In our scripture passage from Acts, the Holy Spirit filled up those who were present and gave them new languages, a way of multiplying God's message, giving them new ways in which to speak God's words of love with those all around them – not only with those who shared their language, their culture, their heritage. In this Pentecostal experience, they are reminded that their mission is much broader than that.

Surely, they needed a reminder that God was still with them on this journey. We all need that. But when the Holy Spirit of Pentecost came rushing in, it wasn't just to say "Hey, how's it going? Don't worry, I'm still here. So just keep on doing what you've always done."

Instead, the Holy Spirit came rushing in to empower them to get up, go out, get moving, and to be the church in the world, to be the Body of Christ. They were being challenged and inspired to do something new. The Holy Spirit came rushing in to bring new life, new inspiration, and new vitality to empower them and inspire them to continue what Jesus started. The Spirit was poured out on them, filling them, so they might pour out God's love on others, so they too might be filled.

After the Holy Spirit shows up, some people thought they were drunk. It's kind of funny, really, and Peter responds, "they're not drunk... it's only nine o' clock in the morning."

Perhaps some of their inhibitions were lowered. But not because they were filled with new wine, as some suggested. Maybe the Holy Spirit made them bolder, braver, less intimidated, and perhaps even giddy. Have you ever been so excited or so inspired, that you let down your guard a little and let your childlike giddiness fly free? That's a good thing!

No, they weren't stumbling around in an inebriated fog, as some thought. They were burning with new clarity, new purpose, and new passion for the mission at hand.

Every year, on this Pentecost day, congregations across the globe gather to remember and celebrate this story of the birth of the church.

But here's the great thing about Pentecost: It doesn't really stop.

We aren't here to remember that the Spirit came and went.

We are here to celebrate that the Spirit has stayed and continues to be alive and active. We are here to celebrate that the Spirit of God has, in fact, been present since the dawn of time, that the Spirit which was alive in Jesus, is still alive and well in this world, in the church, in this congregation, in this very room, in our very hearts.

We are a Pentecost people. The Holy Spirit is still writing a story for us, with us, and through us. This is the latest chapter in a long, long story of God's work in the world.

Pentecost is not a story of what the Holy Spirit once did. It's a story of what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit inspires new creativity all the time. The Holy Spirit empowers people to new acts of care and compassion all the time. The Holy Spirit fills people anew all the time, recharging us when we feel drained. The Holy Spirit teaches people new languages of love, new ways to speak God's grace, all the time. The Holy Spirit continues to do the work of drawing us together, helping us connect and communicate.

It is true that we do need to pay attention, to listen, to watch, and sometimes even to wait patiently for that right moment, for the spark of inspiration, for the creativity that stirs, for the warmth that reassures and empowers. Part of the spiritual discipline of prayer, part of the practice of our faith, is simply practicing openness.

We know we can't control everything; we can't plan everything; we can't know how our lives will unfold. But we can stay open. We can approach each day with curiosity, gratitude, and open our hearts to receive what God has to offer.

And yes, the Holy Spirit shows up even in the tough stuff too – in the heartbreak that moves us to deeper compassion, in the guidance and presence that helps us navigate our next steps when faced with a big decision, in helping us do the difficult thing we must do, in the presence and care of those who love and support us, in the peace that passes human understanding when there are no easy answers.

In all of life, when we pay attention, we can see the Holy Spirit alive and active all over the place. Be on the lookout. It may not always be as dramatic as that Pentecost moment, but the Spirit is still at work. The breeze still blows. The fire still burns.

The Spirit is at work anytime someone does the loving thing when it's hard or the brave thing when it's scary.

The Spirit is at work when you show up for someone who needs your care or they show up for you. The Spirit is at work in your presence and your prayers.

The Spirit is at work when people change their minds about something. When we are moved by another person's story, experience, or perspective. When we grow, the Spirit is there.

The Spirit is at work when you offer your best to the world, whatever that may be. Part of the Pentecost story is an affirmation that each and every one of us is inspired, called, and empowered to share God's love in our various ways. I think the disciples needed that reminder. And maybe we do too.

The Spirit is at work when we face up to the big challenges and issues of our day and work together to build bridges and find new ways forward.

When we refuse to believe that we can't do anything about the wars, the guns, the hate and violence, that has been so prevalent lately, the Spirit is at work in that refusal. And maybe the Spirit can lead us toward some solutions, if we only listen.

The Spirit is at work... often in lots of small ways. But small things can add up.

And the Spirit is at work in this church!

The Spirit is at work when you make sack lunches for those who are hungry in our community, when you share God's love through a meal, an act of hospitality and kindness to those for whom the world is not always so hospitable.

When you serve, when you care, when you help out, when you offer your time and talents, the Spirit is at work.

We can't be the church all by ourselves. We need each other. We need you. And we need the various languages you speak – whether it be music, or finance, or mission and outreach, or plumbing, or education. We need your voice, your ideas, your sense of humor, your insights. We need your contribution to the whole.

The Spirit is at work in this community. People are always saying so!

In a world that can feel pretty isolating at times, it is doubly important that we live into our Spirit-led call to be the church in the world. There are more chapters yet to be written in the Spirit's unfolding story.

Let's make it a good one – full of fun, adventure, love, laughter, and meaning. And may this story, our story, always speak to God's abundant love and make a positive difference in the lives of others and the world around us.

Amen.