

May 31, 2020 Sermon  
John 20:19-23 (Gospel)  
Acts 2:1-21 (Sermon based on this scripture text)

I'm almost *positive* that *most* families *love* getting together for holidays and special occasions, and my mother's side of the family was no exception. We would gather for Christmas, Easter, birthdays...you name it. If *it* could be celebrated, *we* would celebrate.

Mom's side of the family was quite large in number. We lived all over the place, but mostly in Ohio. A few cousins lived in Illinois, and I had an uncle that lived in Arizona. Because of the fact the uncle in Arizona wasn't available to come to all the celebrations, it was a *huge deal* when he returned home for a visit.

It was not just a huge deal in that we all got excited to *see* him, even though I called him my *favorite* uncle (which is probably because I DIDN'T see him all the time). The excitement came from the fact that we would plan a time when we could ALL get together and celebrate him being home.

Arranging this celebration usually took a bit of doing because, first of all, it involved food, and the women of the family needed to know how much to cook, even though they would always cook more than was needed. So that meant trying to schedule a time when *everyone* could be there.

My uncle almost *always* visited in the summertime, so scheduling around a family of farmers and blue-collar workers was no easy task, but it would all fall into place, he would arrive, and we would gather at my grandparent's house.

Now...on top of gathering to eat, the second favorite thing to do in Mom's family was talk and talk and talk...mostly at the same time, and at the top of your lungs, because if you're *talking* when someone *else* is talking you want to be able to be heard. I think you're getting the picture.

So, picture a whole bunch of loud talking people together (that I love very much, by the way), and with each new person that walks in the door, they are asked what route they took to get to grandma's house.

Then, imagine, if you will, all the talking that went on as each one questioned WHY one would take the route they took. The noise level got louder and louder, and, *remember*, I said it was *usually* summertime, and my grandparent's house was *not* air conditioned, and there were LOTS of people gathered there.

THIS is the image I get when I read about the day of Pentecost, believe it or not. I get this image Every. Single Time.

Now, granted, there are no tongues of fire resting on anyone, at my grandparent's house, and no one is speaking in any language but English; but it's hot, it's noisy...and *seriously*, can you *not* just hear that great rush of a violent wind, as the news rolls through the family about the highways and byways you took to get here?

It starts IMMEDIATELY upon entering the house. The screen door slams, the questions start in the kitchen, and roll through the rest of the rooms that are *unbelievably* full of relatives.

They may have been speaking in the same language, but they *all* had a different path to the grandparents' house from a different geographic location; different ways of getting there, and yet, *all* arriving at the same place, and *all* united as family either by blood or marriage.

Give some thought to the ways God in Christ works through the Holy Spirit to gather people together.

"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 the ability."

"In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power...what does this mean?"

So Peter, who is not always thought of as the best spokesperson in the world, speaks up, with a nudge from the Holy Spirit, and starts echoing Joel's prophecy: *"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, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then EVERYONE who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

The Holy Spirit gathers us into community. On the day of Pentecost, people were gathered together from *everywhere* in anticipation of this *wonderous* event. They didn't understand what was happening, Peter was *compelled* by the Holy Spirit to explain, and people began to understand that even though they spoke in different languages, they were a *broader* part of the kingdom of God, *pulled* together by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then *freed* and *empowered* by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of God's reign.

Because of this powerful rush of wind, the tongues of flame and the hearing of Joel's prophecy, new communities were created, but created around the life-saving and loving knowledge of God in Christ. *Different* people, speaking *different* languages, coming from *different* places, taking *different* routes, but ALL with the same goal, and that goal was to spread the loving Word of God to others who may not look or sound or dress the same, but can now gather together through the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, in today's text, was, at first, probably *terrifying* and *disorienting*, but the outcome was that of rejoicing. Drawing people together for *one* cause, for *one* purpose, to become the *body* of Christ is a moment to *savor* and *rejoice*!

I'm not sure *anyone* has felt all that much like rejoicing, lately. We want to be together...physically together...but we can't. Oh, we can be around family that we're used to being around, but we're still a little stand-offish on being around others that aren't normally in our home.

Then there's that little issue with the masks. I don't care anything about which side of that issue you're on, but masks *do* conceal a bit of your face. You can *still* be close to someone and yet you're *separated* by a mask that doesn't exactly reveal your full personality to another. Seeing someone shake hands makes me cringe, I feel compelled to ask a person if I can hug them, even though I don't, but I *miss* that part of being in community.

And then there's that whole idea of speaking in different languages. We have ALL been speaking a different language lately, but it all revolves around the virus. We *all* have a different take, different *ideas*, differing *opinions*, and we don't all get our news from the same source, and *still* we get a little nudge from the Holy Spirit calling us into community.

Maybe Covid-19 was OUR rush of wind, was OUR tongues of fire landing on *our* heads. Maybe this virus was meant to *grab* our attention, to *bring* us together rather than *divide* us, and we're all still confused because we don't have a modern-day Peter to stand up and explain to us what all of this means.

NO, I'm not suggesting that God caused this virus. This is truly from the fact that humans are just naturally germy people. Some of us are carriers and some of us have low immune systems, and let's face it, we're on the move...a LOT!

We are a people that loves to travel. We have *trouble* staying in one place for very long. We *love* to gather together, and in order to get places, we get on *planes* and take *Princess Cruises* and we are on *subways* and *trolleys* and *busses* and any *other* vehicle that can be named that puts us in close proximity to one another. So, it stands to reason that one sneeze in close quarters can start an avalanche of sickness.

We want to be together, but we know that is not a really good idea right now, so we find ourselves worshipping in community but apart, as we long for that physical, up close and personal community. We *want* that in person stuff...we *really do*!

But, we can still rejoice in the Holy Spirit. We can still rejoice in the beautiful spring, in the new babies, in the weddings that have either happened or will happen, and in the new birth of gathering together that will be created when this virus finally comes to an end...we WILL rejoice!

For now, though, we need to find and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. We need to continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus, helping those who have been hurt by this pandemic through public service; feeding others, and standing up for those in this world who are treated unjustly.

Know that the Holy Spirit is at work in our community, whether you can feel the rush of that holy wind, or not. The Holy Spirit is here...the comforter, the advocate, sent to us by God in Christ. And we are not alone in that knowledge.

Take this time of separating from others to let the Holy Spirit help you find your voice, your gifts, and your skills that will allow you to love and serve. It doesn't matter how you find them, what route you take, or how you *get* to the point of loving and serving. What *does* matter is that you will *find* yourself in the community of *God's* loving people when you *finally* arrive, and you will find that others will rejoice with you!

Happy Day of Pentecost!  
Amen!