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First United Methodist Church

Springboro, Ohio

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Pentecost

“The Gift of the Spirit”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21, John 16:5-16

Today we celebrate Pentecost. Pentecost means the 50th day. Pentecost is a holy day that we share with our Jewish brothers and sisters. They count the 50 days from the Passover and on this 50th day, they celebrate the gift of God giving the law to Moses and the people of Israel during the Exodus.

We as Christians count the 50 days from Easter, for on the 50th day, once again, God gave us a gift, one even more spectacular and more amazing than the law. God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Over the Easter season, we have been using John 13-17 to talk about the gifts of Easter. And so we might have lost track of what the disciples were doing during this time. So let’s go back and think about what was happening during this 50 days.

Jesus rose on Easter and appeared to the disciples several times. As he did, their hearts were filled with joy and hope. He was alive! And yet they knew that he wasn’t with them in the same way that he had been before his death. He would come and go. Sometimes it would take them awhile to recognize him. And then the time came that he had told them about when he would have to return to the Father.

Before he left them, he gave them instructions to carry on his work of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them everything that he had taught them.

He told them to go and wait in Jerusalem where they would receive power from on high, and he promised to be there with them always. And then he left them and ascended into heaven.

It was all a little confusing and mysterious, but by now they were learning to do what Jesus said. So they went to Jerusalem to wait.

And they waited together. Jesus didn’t give them a time frame. After a week of waiting, I’m sure they were starting to discuss what they should do. After all, they couldn’t just sit around and wait forever.

Thankfully, it was almost Pentecost. And that meant that Jerusalem was filled with all sorts of people, Jews from all over the place, who had come to Jerusalem for this holy event. It was like the mall before Christmas. Everyone was out and about, busy and excited.

And as faithful Jews, the disciples were preparing for this holy day too.

And as that 50th day came, Pentecost, they gathered together to celebrate God’s gift of the law to the Jewish people.

But as they were together, what they had been waiting for happened. There in the room was the sound like rushing wind. There was light like flames. They were filled with words, not their own, but words from God.

It caused such a commotion that the people on the street noticed, Jews from all over the world. And as they listened, they heard the disciples speaking in their own language, in a way that they could understand, sharing the story of Jesus, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, his power to save. They heard an invitation to believe in him and they did. Many became his followers that day.

Everyone was awed, amazed, and confused about what was happening. That is until Peter was able to explain to them that this was the Spirit of God that the prophet Joel spoke of. This is the day when it finally happened, the spirit was poured out on all people.

And what made this possible was the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. He ascended to heaven so that he could send his own Spirit to be with each of us in a personal way always and anywhere throughout time.

And that is what happened that day—this new law was written on their hearts—the Holy Spirit, Jesus Spirit was with them, guiding, directing, teaching, encouraging, and advocating for them.

And amazing things happened. The disciples were filled with courage and purpose. They began to take their experience with Jesus and their understanding of the scriptures and put them together into a new way of living and being that included all people in God’s family, not just the Jewish people or those who decided to follow Jewish law first.

It was a miraculous time. Boundaries were shifted, the divisions between clean and unclean, circumcised and uncircumcised, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, fell away and the Holy Spirit united them as the Body of Jesus Christ, a new way of being the church.

What a profound and amazing gift.

Often, as we talk about Pentecost, we talk about what happened once, a very long time ago.

But the reason we celebrate Pentecost today is to remind us that this miracle is still happening even today. Whenever we believe in Jesus and open our hearts to him, he will send his Spirit to fill us, to guide us, to make us new creation. Even here today the Holy Spirit is present, alive and active. Can you see it? Can you hear it?

Will you receive it and live into it? Just like the other gifts we’ve talked about this season, it has to be opened, unpacked, figured out, made a part of our daily life.

As we receive this gift, we find that we have many of the same experiences that the disciples had. First, the Holy Spirit helps us to believe. It helps our faith to grow and to remain steadfast even when those around us plant seeds of doubt. It helps us to believe even when we cannot prove something, even when it isn’t tangible. It connects us to something far greater that we can touch or see, to the holy mystery of God.

And then it reminds us of our purpose as Christians. First we believe and then we do the work of Jesus Christ. The great commission that Jesus gave to the disciples is our mission as well. The mission statement of the United Methodist church is “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Who is the Holy Spirit nudging you to share the good news of Jesus with? How is the Holy Spirit nudging you to take a different path so that you can encounter those who need Jesus and share his love with them in a way that they can hear and understand?

It’s always a little scary to think about sharing our faith.

And so we have to train ourselves to pay attention to the Spirit, to practice discernment. Too often we have our plans and ideas of how we should share with someone and what they should do and how they should do it and we charge ahead. But like the disciples, often we are instructed to wait for God’s time and God’s word. And when we do, things fall into place and the good news is shared and received.

But then other times we get too comfortable and we have to listen to the Holy Spirit’s nudge that pushes us out of our comfort zones and into the places where Jesus’ work needs to be done. We find that the Holy Spirit is the wind of change and the refiner’s fire. We realize that it will call us to be more than we are and to step out in faith. And it seems easier to leave that to someone else, or perhaps to leave things are they are. For walking by faith doesn’t come with all the answers. They are only given one step at a time.

But we get better as we practice, paying attention, not being afraid, walking in step with the Spirit. Each step we take gets a little more steady as we realize that God is faithful, that the Holy Spirit is with us.

Today we give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit that is always pushing us out of our comfort zones into God’s new creation, from our half-truths to God’s full truth, from belief to action, from the church to the world, to do the work of Jesus.

James Boyce sums it up beautifully, “The Spirit gives us power to go and bear witness in the world to the events of the Son’s love made real and present for the world.”

So may we be filled with that power of the Holy Spirit so that we may go and bear witness in the world to the love of God in Jesus Christ in very real and present ways.