

# And Here We Are

A message by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
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**May 31, 2020 – The Day of Pentecost**

- Scripture: Acts 2:1-39 Good News Translation

The last time we heard from Peter the apostle, it wasn't one of his best days. He turned his back on his most devoted friend Jesus. Three times. As Jesus had predicted. After Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Temple guards, Peter denied being associated with Jesus.

That's the last we heard about Peter according to what Luke wrote in his gospel. After that Peter just blended in with the other apostles and the dozens of other followers of Jesus who hung out together. They spent time praying together, socializing, worshiping in the Temple like almost everybody else, but in general sort of "laying low." The buzz over the crucifixion of Jesus from Galilee had died down, but the apostles and other believers didn't want to take any chances by drawing attention to themselves. They got in the habit of gathering on a rooftop patio, above the noise of the crowded alleys, out of view of passers-by.

And on the day in question there were more passers-by than normal. It was the week of the Pentecost festival. The Day of Pentecost was one of just three annual feast days on the Jewish calendar when the faithful would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem if possible. These *ex-patriate* Jews would make their way to Jerusalem from Elam in modern-day Iran, from Phrygia and Pamphylia in present-day Turkey, from Libya in northern Africa... yes, they came from all over. Jerusalem on those feast days sounded like the United Nations, what with all the different native languages being spoken, as well as hearing the pilgrims trying to use their rusty Hebrew.

The day in question was Sunday, which is the first day of the work week in that part of the world. In addition to presence of the out-of-town pilgrims, business proceeded as usual with people making their way to and from the Temple for prayer and to offer sacrifices and make money offerings.

- Men crafted housewares in their shops.
- Women returning from the market steered their gleeful children through the crowds.
- Merchants hawked their wares to anyone within earshot.
- Laborers groaned under the weight of the stone and mortar they were hauling to a construction site.

A normal start to the week. And then it happened.

According to Luke's account in the Acts of the Apostles, without warning God's Holy Spirit suddenly descended upon the "believers" – the followers of Jesus. Not on just one or two... not just on the apostles... but on all who were gathered in that upper room which, according to Luke, could have been about 120 in all.

And how did they know something had happened to them? How did the believers know that they were being filled with the Holy Spirit? By what they heard, and what they saw, and what they felt, and what they did.

They *heard* the roar of a mighty wind. They *saw* what looked like tongues of fire touching each one. They *felt* inspired – which literally means “a spirit in” them. And they began to *speak* languages they didn’t even know.

But people down at street level knew those languages. Right there in the middle of Jerusalem those out-of-towners were hearing their own native languages. The sound of that mighty wind had echoed through that part of the city, quickly drawing a crowd of the curious as the believers descended the steps and went out into the streets.

If you’ve ever traveled overseas you know how the sound of English being spoken immediately catches your ear. That’s what happened to the Parthians, Medians, Elamites, Phrygians, Egyptians, Arabians and the rest – they could hardly believe that they were hearing their own languages being spoken by a bunch of country bumpkins from middle-of-nowhere Galilee. The people of Jerusalem couldn’t make sense of what they were seeing and hearing from the Galileans. Someone came up with a dismissive explanation: “Oh, they’re just intoxicated. Shameful!”

Remember Peter? The devoted apostle who felt threatened by his association with Jesus and so denied that he knew Jesus... three times? The apostle who we hadn’t heard from since that embarrassing, regretful night, according to Luke’s scriptures?

When the Holy Spirit descended upon those believers, it emboldened Peter to speak. To preach. To profess his devotion to Jesus. God’s Holy Spirit forgave him, transformed him, empowered him, guided him in what to say and what to do. And from what the Holy Spirit did through Peter, the other disciples were enabled as well to proclaim their faith in God through Jesus the Son. They proclaimed it that day and in the years that followed to the people of their generation. And then that generation to the next... and to the next... and next... and here we are.

And the Holy Spirit didn’t hold the believers captive in Jerusalem. They sensed the call of God’s Holy Spirit to disperse, to take the gospel and go down the street and across the valley to the next village and across the sea to the next continent... and here we are.

And the Holy Spirit didn’t discriminate about who was and wasn’t worthy of receiving the blessing of faith in God through Jesus the Son. And so the believers told their fellow Jews, and their Greek friends worshipping an assortment of deities; they told everybody they met, whether they were from Arabia or Cappadocia or Egypt or Crete or Rome... and here we are.

Yes, here we are... thanks to God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, we entrust our lives to God because of our faith in Jesus Christ the Son, Jesus Christ the personification of God’s love. As the Holy Spirit dispersed the believers from their gathering place on that Day of Pentecost to go out into the world, the Holy Spirit has dispersed you and me from this familiar, comforting, and cherished gathering place.

I know that many of you would love to be right here where I am:

- sitting in this sanctuary;
- soaking in the peace and comfort of this familiar place;
- hearing familiar voices and soul-stirring tunes;

- in the presence of our friends, or perhaps with extended family;
- and yes, gathered with some folks we aren't acquainted with but who are spiritual siblings because of our common faith.

We would love to be right here right now, in part because that would mean that this pandemic was history.

But instead, as a community of faith we are what some are calling “the dispersed church.” We’re disbursed throughout the community... indeed, some of you watching now are in places *far distant* from the shores of Lake Erie. And maybe we’re dispersed because this is where God needs us to be: not only for one another’s physical safety, but to focus on how we can be ambassadors of Jesus Christ in the smaller social circles in which we find ourselves.

On this unique Day of Pentecost, our movements are restricted to varying degrees by the conditions we’re living in. Despite our inability to get around like we’re accustomed to and like we want to, God’s Holy Spirit fills us in order to serve God’s will. For by God’s gift of the Spirit to Christ’s worldwide church, God enables us:

- to embody the love of Jesus;
- to demonstrate the acceptance of Jesus;
- to grace others with the forgiveness of Jesus; and
- to lift others with hope rooted in faith in Jesus.

Right where we are, God’s Holy Spirit equips us to be a blessing in the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ.