



## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Council on Christian Unity

### Worship Resources

*Prepared by Ron Allen and Linda McKiernan-Allen*

#### **6. Pentecost**

**Sunday May 23, 2010**

#### **Resources for Today**

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#### **Focus for Today: The Holy Spirit Creates Community that Honors Diversity**

While the giving of the Spirit is told in two stories—Acts 2:1-42 and in John 20:19-23—the church has fastened upon the version in Acts as focus for Pentecost Sunday. The worship materials for today evolve around the major themes of Pentecost.

Some Christians think of Pentecost as the birthday of the church and celebrate the day with only passing reference to the Holy Spirit. Others think of Pentecost as celebrating the Holy Spirit filling believers as individuals and refer to the community of the church only in passing. Luke, author of the book of Acts, sees Pentecost demonstrating that the Holy Spirit constitutes the church as a community that embodies the Realm of God. As such, it is a community in which people of different cultures come together in their cultural distinctiveness to share life together in the Realm of God. Indeed, an index of the degree to which a congregation is open to the Spirit is the degree to which the community brings together people who are often distant, estranged, and even hostile.

The Fourth Gospel views the world quite differently from Luke-Acts. However, the two bodies of literature have resemblances in the way view the work of the Spirit. For John, the Spirit continues the presence and work of Jesus in the world (as explained more fully below). This work includes drawing people from diverse places in life into the sphere of God's love that is embodied in the church.

Each Pentecost, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) receives a “special day” offering to support new congregational starts through Disciples Mission Fund. Working on a goal of establishing 1000 new church starts by 2020, most of the current 475 starts are taking place in communities referred to as “racial/ethnic”. With respect to the make-up of the Disciples movement as a whole, the coming together of such diverse bodies suggests the presence and leading of the Spirit. The preacher needs to lead in reflecting the ways each congregation is bringing, and might bring, together people who are quite different.

[Material marked with an asterisk \* was developed by Linda McKiernan-Allen and Ron Allen]

### **Call to Worship**

[Adapted from Michael J. Walker, *Chalice Hymnal* 240]

L: Come! Now is the time to worship

P: We come, asking God’s Spirit to give us faith, that we might hear in the wind’s blowing.

L: We ask for courage, that we may not fear the tongues of flame.

P: With open minds and open hearts, we wait for God’s Spirit.

L: Come, wind! Come, fire!

P: Come, truth! Come, love!

All: Come, let us worship the Lord our God.

### **Opening Prayer**

[Solo voice, or choir, sing verse 3 of “Spirit, Come, Dispel Our Sadness” (*Chalice Hymnal* 253) to the tune of Pleading Savior]

Author of the new creation, come, anoint us with your power.

Make our hearts your habitation; with your grace our spirits shower.

Hear, O hear our supplication, blessed Spirit, God of peace!

Rest upon this congregation with the fullness of your grace.

### **Significant Quote**

In an eloquent statement, Clark M. Williamson, a leading systematic theologian in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) describes an important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit that is especially pertinent to Pentecost. The Spirit brings us into solidarity with others. “Solidarity means identifying with the nobodies, those whom Jesus gathered about himself, the destitute and the neglected, the homeless of our time and place. Solidarity is the social spirituality of love. Growing up in the Christian life means having an increasingly large circle of those with whom we practice communion. Such solidarity is part of the very being of the church. The Spirit creates the church (Acts 2:1-21) by establishing one community from ‘devout Jews from every nation under heaven’—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and so forth, each group speaking its own distinctive language. A formula for chaos and conflict is translated into one community hearing and speaking about ‘God’s deeds of power.’” Clark M. Williamson, *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p. 247.

Indeed, “One of the greatest challenges and opportunities facing the church today is that of overcoming the fact that the church reflects in its makeup the stratifications and divisions of society. Most typical Protestant churches [of European origin] are composed of people of one economic class, usually middle to upper-middle class. The presence of any of the poor, the hungry, or those audibly mourning would be a source of discomfort. But growing up in the Christian life entails entering into ever larger and more diverse relationships that are generated and maintained by the Spirit” (p. 247).

Williamson avers that many people of European origin “so affirmed the autonomy of human beings that they presumptuously appropriated for themselves the functions of God. What Paul Tillich once labeled critically as ‘self-sufficient finitude’ aptly describes the modern understanding of human beings [in a Eurocentric perspective]. William A. Clebsch puts it more colloquially and directly when he says that ‘Europeans . . . singly and collectively became their own do-it-yourself deities.’” However, “God’s Spirit is not just another name for whatever we may think of as ‘spiritual.’ God’s Spirit is the Spirit that brings well being and blessing. The Spirit that reconciles the alienated, that gathers the scattered into community, that rescues fallen, illumines the confused, gives hope to the hopeless. The human spirit, as we have all too many occasions to observe, is frequently enough self-abusing, self-destructive, capable of doing catastrophic damage to the well-being of others” (pp. 239-240).

### **Other Ideas for Pentecost Worship\***

- Invite the congregation to wear red for Pentecost worship.
- Have the children or youth make red stoles  
for worship participants, or for everyone in the worship service.
- Prepare sheer banners which will move in worship when a fan is turned on,  
as a demonstration of Spirit as wind.  
Use a sound track of wind blowing through a forest.
- Invite the congregation to make the sound of the wind blowing.
- Read the text in multiple languages.  
Create poster boards with SPIRIT written down the side and invite small groups or families  
to use each letter to begin a word describing Pentecost:  
Surprising  
Powerful  
Inspiring  
Rich  
Intoxicating  
Thanks

Consider creating kites for the Pentecost service, which could be used in the children’s moment and at the communion table. This litany would help make the connection.

**Leader:** Those who fly kites know that kites are earthbound and cannot lift and soar until they are caught by the wind.

**People:** People and churches are earthbound

and cannot be themselves until the wind of God's Spirit lifts them to fly.

**Leader:** Kites are not free to thrust and move until they are let go to explore the skies.

**People:** People and churches are not free to love and care until they can let go and catch the Spirit which is love.

**Leader:** Kites have no power and direction unless they are caught and controlled by the wind.

**People:** People and churches have no power and direction unless they allow the Spirit of God to move within them.

**Leader: Let us pray...**

**Together:** O God, may your Spirit lift us from being earthbound and free us to soar, to explore, to have direction and purpose.

O God, help us to fly as people freed by your Spirit, to live and to love.

by Marcus Benjamin (taken from the web-site below)

Read more about a service with kites at [http://thebillabong.info/otm\\_pcost/otm67\\_p8.html](http://thebillabong.info/otm_pcost/otm67_p8.html)

### **Invitation to the Table\***

Invite someone who speaks each language known in the congregation to be part of the invitation. If the congregation is completely English speaking, invite persons from different generations to speak in “ordinary” language characteristic of their cohort (child, teen, young adult, mid-life, senior).

Each person should share their invitation as if they were inviting folks to come eat with them.

Let the congregation respond to this multi-level invitation by singing :

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us.

Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us.

### **Notes for Preaching\***

*(based on the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary for May 23, 2010)*

#### **Acts 2:1-2**

More detailed exegetical perspective on Luke and Acts is given in the worship resources developed for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 24, 2010). A key observation is that Luke believed history was divided into two ages—the present evil time that was soon to pass away and the coming Realm of God that would appear in its fullness after an apocalypse. Another key observation: Luke regarded the ministry and resurrection of Jesus as signals that the Realm was already partially present but would come in completeness only at Jesus’ return.

Luke assumes that readers know the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. At the beginning of Genesis 11, all members of the human family could live and work together because

everyone spoke one language. However, they decided to build a tower (a ziggurat) to reach the heavens to “make a name for themselves,” i.e. to claim for themselves power and glory that only God could bestow. When God saw their project, God was appalled, and noted that their ability to speak the same language enabled them to cooperate on this insidious project. Consequently, God scattered the people all over the face of the earth and gave them different languages to speak so they could no longer work together on evil. In the wake of this incident, rivalry and animosity came to play a prominent role in the human family.

The apocalyptic theologians, including Luke, believed that at the final manifestation of the Realm, God would reunite the broken human members of the human family into one great reunion. Some apocalyptic writers also believed that in the last days, God would pour out the Spirit in an extravagant way both to signal the coming of the Realm and to empower people to live through it.

Luke follows traditional Judaism in seeing the Holy Spirit as one of God’s closest agents. At the time of Luke, that community believed the Spirit was active in the creation of the world, continued to give life to individuals and to sustain the world, filled special people for special missions, and would become more prominent in the last days.

Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival. For Luke, this contributes to the symbolic meaning of the events in our text: They are part of the eschatological harvest, the ingathering of peoples leading to the last days.

To Luke, the Pentecost experience was a communal event. The followers of Jesus were together when the Spirit came down. While the tongues of fire rested on each one, the tongues derived from a common source. They created mutual understanding and community among people from diverse places. To be sure, Luke’s language of “filling” suggests that the outflow of the Spirit had a profound visceral quality. However, the effect Luke underlines is not individual emotion but the re-generation of community (Acts 2:1-4)

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul refers to the congregation speaking glossolalia (what our grandparents called “unknown tongues”). This was Spirit-inspired utterances made up of distinct syllables and sounds, though not a distinct language. The tongues in Acts are quite different. Under the impetus of the Spirit, Jewish people from different parts of the Mediterranean world who spoke different languages began to be able to understand one another. The Spirit led people to speak in languages other than their native tongues so that people from the lands where those languages were spoken could understand. In a reverse from Babel, people who could not make sense of one another were now together in mutual understanding (Acts 2:5-13).

In Acts 2:14-21, Peter offers a theological interpretation of the events of Acts 2:1-13. God is pouring out the Spirit as a sign that the community is living in the last days. This will strengthen the community as it lives through those days towards the second coming (Acts 2:17a; 2:19-20).

Moreover, the Spirit not only reverses the chaos in the human family created at Babel, but the Spirit is restoring relationships within the community to qualities that they had in Eden. God is replacing the hierarchical social structure governing women and men, slave and free, with egalitarian modes of relationship.

For all its power, the effects of the event described in Acts 2 were limited. The differences among Parthians, Medes, Elamites and others were real differences of culture and language. But this infilling of the Spirit took place only among Jewish folk. Despite their common heritage and identity in Judaism, these peoples were so divided among themselves that God had to restore their own sense of connection as a part of the re-creation of the human family.

But Pentecost is incomplete because gentiles did not receive the Holy Spirit in the same way. Consequently, the reunion of the human family in the eschatological community (the church) was incomplete. The Spirit did not fall upon gentiles until Acts 10:34-48 (after God sent Peter to Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army). Note that the first gentile Luke indicates is Cornelius -- not just a garden-variety gentile but an officer in the army of the idolatrous, repressive, and violent Roman Empire.

The two phases of the coming of the Spirit are suggestive for preaching.

1) In Acts 2, the Spirit renews community among people of Jewish origin. The Christian world today is much like the Jewish community as depicted by Luke: divided into different groups. The Jewish community had Parthians, Medes, and Elamites while church today has Disciples, Methodists, Evangelical Free, Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. In order for the world-wide church to witness as an eschatological community, all different denominations and movements need to be more responsive to the movement of the Spirit. The preacher might ask the question, "How can our congregation respond to the leading of the Spirit to work together with the congregation down the street, even if we are as different as Parthians and Medes?"

2) In Acts 10, the second phase of the coming of the Spirit brings gentiles into communion with Jewish believers, thus filling out the eschatological community. This part of Luke-Acts pushes the preacher and congregation to explore how the Holy Spirit is luring the congregation towards eschatological cooperation and community. How are we to build community with people and groups who are as different from us as Cornelius was to the Jewish community of Luke's day? Cornelius was not a romantic "Other." Cornelius was an agent of Roman oppression.

[For more on Luke's understanding of the great reunion of the human family, see Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts*. Preaching Classic Texts (Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 89-106]

### **John 14:8-16**

On the two-sphere world view of the Gospel of John, please see the comments on worship resources No. 1, John 2:1-11, January 17, 2010 (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day).

Having this reading from John alongside the preceding passage from Acts highlights respectful diversity within the Bible itself. While both Acts and John picture the Holy Spirit as present with the community, they offer different perceptions of the Spirit. As noted above, Luke presents the Holy Spirit along traditional Jewish lines. In the Fourth Gospel, by contrast, the Holy Spirit is the continuing presence of Jesus with the congregation after the resurrection. This is evident in today's reading when the Johannine Jesus says God will send *another* Advocate (Paraclete)

(John 14:15). See also 1 John 2:1. Moreover, Jesus has just said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) and here describes the Spirit as the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17). The Spirit abides in the community in the same way that God abides in Jesus and Jesus abides in the believer. These themes are even more explicit in John 16:4b-15.

From the perspective of the Johannine world view, the Spirit continues to manifest the presence of Jesus in the world. The “world” is a technical Johannine expression referring to existence that takes place apart from God. Because Jesus brought the sphere of heaven into the world, the Spirit does the same. This is important, since by the time John wrote, Jesus had ascended to God.

These perspectives, along with paying attention to the Johannine context, help us hear more fully Jesus’ remarks in John 14:8-14. In John 13:31-35, Jesus indicates he will not be with the disciples much longer. To guide them in living after his departure, Jesus commands the disciples to love one another. In John, Jesus defines love through his self-giving: he comes down from heaven into world and reveals God’s love for the world --fractious, alienated, blind and violent as it may be. Those who believe in Jesus remain in the world but they live in a sphere of experience, values and behavior that derive from heaven. According to John 13:31-35, the members of John’s congregation are to express that kind of love for one another. They are to be a community of heaven in the midst of the world.

Immediately after this teaching, Peter wants to follow Jesus. However, it is not time for Peter and the disciples to come with Jesus. Indeed, Peter soon denies Jesus (John 13:36-38). Evidently the disciples were troubled by these things—they could not immediately follow Jesus and they heard the prediction of Peter’s denial. Jesus thus assures them that when he goes to God in heaven, he will prepare dwelling places that will be large enough to accommodate them all (John 14:1-4).

When Thomas presses Jesus for further information about the way, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and he life. No one comes to [God] except through me.” While many Christians are troubled by the singular and exclusive route to salvation posed by this saying, we have time now only to focus on its function in John. It assures a troubled congregation that if they believe in Jesus, they can count on dwelling in heaven when the time comes for them to follow Jesus to God. John’s capstone point here is that those who know Jesus also know God. Scholars debate whether John presents Jesus as God (almost in a Trinitarian sense) or whether John sees Jesus and God as one in purpose while separate in identity. In either case, the effect is much the same: Jesus is the most reliable revelation of God’s purposes.

In John 14:8, Philip may serve as a voice for many in the Johannine community as he makes a statement showing he does not (and they do not) fully understand what God is doing through Jesus. Philip wants to see God. Jesus assumes the role of a teacher in explaining the capstone point (from just above). In the discussion in 14:9-11a, Jesus and God are distinct beings, yet God is in Jesus and Jesus is in God. That is, awareness of the presence and purposes of God fills Jesus. An important point is that the words of Jesus reliably communicate the purposes of God.

If the disciples (the Johannine congregation) do not find the words of Jesus convincing, then Jesus’ works (which are the works of God) will convince them (John 14:10b-11). The works obviously include the seven signs included in John’s gospel. They also include bringing people

out of the world and into the community of Jesus (sphere of heaven) in which they experience love, support, sight, joy, peace, abundance and community. God authorizes these works.

John 14:12 connects directly with the theme of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “I tell you, the one who believes in me will do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.” The “greater works” are not greater in scope (bigger than feeding 5,000 in the wilderness or raising the dead) but greater in the sense of taking place more widely. Jesus could perform these works only in the limited geography around his own physical person. There are many more disciples than the one person Jesus. Wherever they go, they can do what he did because the Holy Spirit demonstrates Jesus’ presence with them.

This text has important implications when thinking about the Holy Spirit and community on Pentecost. In the world, according to John, people live in fractured relationships. They are blind and engage in behaviors (such as lying and violence) that destroy community. God does not want people to live in fragmented groups. By contrast, the primary work of Jesus is to draw people out of the world and into community with him, with God and with one another. Jesus commands the disciples to love one another, that is, the members of the church are to love one another in the same way that Jesus loves the world. The church is to continue the works of Jesus.

Unfortunately, the Fourth Gospel does not place much emphasis on Jesus’ disciples loving the world. However, if the Paraclete (the Spirit) is the presence of Jesus with the disciples, then it is natural for the church to continue to reveal God’s purposes in the world (in the same way that Jesus did). This includes facilitating people living together in communities of love, peace, joy, and abundance.

### **Closing Prayer\***

God of wonders, wind and word,  
Send us now from this place, prepared to live in the Spirit,  
always seeking to build up your beloved community.  
Speak your love through us, until we’re once again gathered to worship you. AMEN

### **Possible Hymns and Songs**

(Numbers in parenthesis are from the *Chalice Hymnal*)

Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove (248)

Gather Us In (284)

Spirit of God, Descend (265)

Sweet, Sweet Spirit (261)

Wind Who Makes All Winds (236)

Spirit of the Living God (259)

Spirit Song (352)

Surely the Presence of the Love (263)

Pentecost Means Happy Birthday, Avery and Marsh

### **Additional Resources**

Pentecost Rap (By Nick Clarke)

Stanza 1: Sunday Morning 'round about 9.00.  
We're all feeling scared, no one feeling fine,  
Meeting in the Market place, talking in the street,  
When down came the Lord, and gave us all a treat.

Chorus: That's what the Prophet Joel predicted  
That's who Jesus said He'd send,  
That's the power of God's Holy Spirit,  
You can get him if you want to,  
He's here 'til the end.

Stanza 2: Flames in our hair, fire in our blood,  
Made us feel strong, made us feel good,  
Feeling kinda weird, feeling kinda strange,  
Some said we're drunk, some said deranged.

Chorus

Stanza 3: All start to babble, some start to fall,  
But we ain't confused, no not at all,  
Ain't on no drugs, ain't had no drink,  
This power's from God, no matter what you think.

Chorus

Stanza 4: Peter was the man, he got up and spoke,  
"These people aren't drunk, and it ain't no joke,  
God's Spirit is within them, don't you realise",  
Thousands believed, and went to get baptised.

Chorus (*repeat last line a second time louder, then shout "CHECK IT OUT" and point to congregation*).

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**The Writers**

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Ron teaches preaching and Gospels and Letters at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. One of his books—just published—is designed to help Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, and individuals explore the range of what Christians believe about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and God’s purposes in the world: *A Faith of Your Own: Naming What You Really Believe*. In addition to being short and inexpensive, this volume includes questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.