

**May 23, 2021**

**By Pastor Michelle Kuhlman**

**St. Andrew Lutheran Church**

Greetings to you on this Festival Sunday of Pentecost! On this day when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have much to celebrate. The Spirit moves in and among us, not only as a church but as individuals. And today, we give special thanks for the ways in which the Spirit has gifted many young people in our congregation as we recognize their graduations. In a time when nothing about their school experiences has been “normal,” we celebrate their accomplishments.

As we turn our attention to the Gospel text for this morning, we once again recognize that Jesus is speaking with his disciples before his death. He offers them assurances that the Holy Spirit, whom he calls the Advocate, is present with them as they move forward in their lives and in ministry. Jesus describes the work of the Advocate: to testify on Jesus’ behalf, to prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement, to guide the disciples into all the truth, and to glorify Jesus. You might think, “is that all?” That’s quite a body of work! The Spirit will empower the disciples as they take their body of knowledge – all they have seen and heard in their time with Jesus – and testify to it throughout the world. Also no small task!

So what of this Holy Spirit, the ruach Adonai? The Hebrew word ruach can mean “spirit,” “wind,” or “breath.” Adonai, of course, is a word for God. In the Ezekiel text this morning, we hear the great story of his vision of the dry bones, when the bones were brought back together and bodies were given breath. The breath of life; the breath of God. Those bones represent the exiles, and God’s promise to give them God’s own spirit (or breath) and bring them back to the land of Israel. The gifts of breath and life are all things of hope and movement, of God acting.

A seminary professor of mine called the Holy Spirit “balm, lamb, blam;” all anagrams of the words she used to describe the Spirit: busy, active, mighty, and living.” The Spirit’s work is surely all of those things and more.

What do you think of when you think of the Holy Spirit? Do you think of a mighty rushing wind? Flames of fire? Maybe a still, small voice? Perhaps you think of the things associated with the Holy Spirit and the church: the color red, which we use to symbolize the Spirit and all of the occasions when we celebrate its' presence – on Pentecost, of course, but on Reformation Sunday, Saint's days, and ordinations as well.

Much of our imagery of the Holy Spirit comes right from our reading from Acts for today. On that particular Pentecost, which had originally been a Jewish festival of a type of thanksgiving held seven weeks after Passover, the Holy Spirit shows up in an unmistakable way – the violent wind and tongues of fire. The disciples were suddenly able to speak in multiple languages and be understood by people from every nation. The text tells us that those who were gathered around and hearing their own native languages were amazed and astonished. How was it that they could understand the words being spoken by these Galileans? These words that spoke to God's deeds of power? Amazed and astonished, indeed. The closest thing I can think of when I imagine this event is what it must be like at the United Nations when all the representatives of different countries are listening to an address being given by some dignitary – they are all hearing the same words coming through their headsets, but that's thanks to some hard-working translators instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. It's nowhere near as incredible an event as what happened on that Pentecost, but it's a start.

I can't let the description of Pentecost go by without acknowledging Peter, who, in the midst of the holy chaos, which included accusations that the disciples must be drunk, decides to step forward and take the opportunity to preach. Bless him, he had a captive audience of sorts, so he used the moment to defend the disciples and to remind the crowd of what the prophet Joel had said about the promised outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. This was another chance to declare that God's Spirit was for everyone – not just people of certain traditions or nations. People from all over the earth would be included in this outpouring.

The Holy Spirit did leave everyone that day amazed and astonished. I wonder if the Holy Spirit ever leaves us amazed and astonished these days? In holy baptism, which we remembered and gave thanks for just a bit

ago, we are named and claimed as beloved children of God, and given gifts of the Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and the spirit of joy in God's presence. That should amaze and astonish us, that each of us has the Holy Spirit within us. These gifts are renewed in us every day. We are each also empowered by the Spirit with other gifts, the talents and abilities that make us unique. Today, as we recognize graduating students, we give thanks to God for those gifts that have brought them this far and will continue to carry them into the future. We pray that the lives of these young people will amaze and astonish us in the years to come.

As you may remember from your study of Luther's Small Catechism, one thing the Holy Spirit does is call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the whole Christian church. The Spirit calls us to unity of purpose, and in our case it is to be an expression of God's love for the whole world (no exceptions!) As we strive to live into that unity, we are sometimes distracted by disagreements and differing opinions. Let us not be divided by these things, rather, let us remember who and whose we are. We are one in the Spirit. Through the power of that Holy Spirit, may we remember what happened on that great Pentecost Sunday. May we not only speak to one another but listen, even if it does feel like we are sometimes speaking other languages. God has called us here at Saint Andrew to be God's voice in this community. But God has also called us to hear God's voice. We have heard that voice and felt the Spirit's abiding presence throughout the life of the congregation, throughout the pandemic, and through times of change and uncertainty. The Spirit has moved to bring two new pastors to Saint Andrew – what a time to feel amazed and astonished! This is surely a time to tune in to the Holy Spirit even more: as safety decisions are made, as pastoral ministries end and new ones begin, and as we dream about what God might be calling us to in the future. My prayer is that we are continuously amazed and astonished by what God is up to in the world, and that we will be bold in proclaiming it to all the world.

Amen.

