

Albany Presbyterian Church
24th May 2026, Acts2:1-21 The day of Pentecost

Today we remember the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the festival of Passover, the day traditionally celebrated by Israel as the giving of the Torah, often called Shavuot, and a harvest festival for the wheat harvest. This Jewish festival, especially associated with the Torah, was also a covenant-renewal festival. If you remember what Ezekiel 11 and Jeremiah say about God writing his law on people's hearts, then Pentecost, the day of the Spirit of God being poured out on people, is just that prophecy fulfilled.

We try to recreate what it was like for those who heard different languages spoken at the same time by people filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The story is full of mystery, with sounds, visions of smoke, tongues of fire, and a flame-like appearance of the Holy Spirit that separated and rested upon Jesus's disciples who began speaking in tongues. It was only nine in the morning.

They were Galileans who spoke Aramaic like Jesus, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven heard the sound of 11 different languages (Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome). It stirred people, leaving them amazed and Perplexed. Some made fun of them, saying they were drunk. But, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up with the others, explained what it all means, citing the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:18-27) to show that this is what God has planned for the last days, and testified to Jesus in later verses. So, what does it all mean? How do we make sense of this story?

First, the disciples were in Jerusalem not because it was one of the biggest Jewish festivals, but because **they trusted Jesus that God's power was coming upon them**, though they were not sure when or how. In Luke 24:49, and also in the book of Acts, chapter 1, we know that Jesus asked his disciples to wait for the power from God on high, the promise of the Father. That Jesus promised them the power of the Spirit to do what Jesus commanded.

As he set out in Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, and Luke 24:47, the command is called the Great Commission, which was to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Who would have thought that the Spirit would give them the ability to speak to so many without learning their language or going there themselves, but by gathering those who were from all Jerusalem, Judah and Samaria, and what to them might be the ends of the earth, who happened to be in Jerusalem that day to celebrate the festival, to hear and experience the power of God and the coming of the Holy Spirit, so that they might come to believe in Jesus?

Secondly, the Spirit is familiar: the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, has been present since the beginning of time. God's Spirit, Ruach, the breath was breathed into the nostrils of the first man, who was created in the beginning. Spirit (Pneuma) is the presence of God that brings order and life in Genesis 1:2. As Anthony reminded us, and as various artists commissioned by Eco church did, Spirit is the creativity that still creates and renews the earth, as the artists sought to express.

The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his **Baptism**, as John describes in Matthew 3:16, where the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. In John 7: 37-39, the Holy Spirit is **the living Water** that quenches our thirst, that is an overflowing, rushing river of life and power that flows from within every believer. Spirit is **the power of God** that empowers and enables Jesus in his ministry (Luke 4:14).

Thirdly, we see the Holy Spirit was poured on people long before Pentecost, for example, in **Numbers 11**, in the story of Moses, when he chose 70 elders in the camp, the Spirit of God came upon each of them, and they all prophesied. It has happened before, and the experience of Pentecost continued throughout history beyond the scriptures, wherever the gospel is preached. For example, **the 18th century Great Awakening** in England and America, when people experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards leading the revival and new birth in Christian churches. And then there was the **charismatic movement in the 20th century**, led by Billy Graham and William Seymore, who preached the

baptism of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of healing and so on. And some of you will remember this and have come to faith through this work of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, not all is well with these revivals and charismatic movements; they have brought church splits, rivalry, and alienation of others who experienced the Spirit differently, which are so far from God's true and right purpose.

The purpose of the Spirit is to encourage and build.

At the end of the story of Pentecost, after Peter finished preaching with great courage, we are told that about 300 thousand among them came to faith. They heard Peter's testimony, felt a cut to their hearts, repented, and were baptised. And this was the beginning of the church as a radically unified community of faith. They shared everything they owned, prayed together, broke bread, and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the earth.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is also to counsel and comfort, to support and guide. The Spirit is meant to teach believers about all things about God and to remind them of everything Jesus said. John 16: 13. The Spirit will lead us to God. The Spirit will lead us to repentance and forgiveness through Christ.

The Spirit gives us peace, the Shalom, as Jesus had in John 20, to the vulnerable and fearful disciples after the resurrection. Jesus gave them shalom, the peace and with it the breath, the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is promised **for all who love God**, as the prophet Joel, whom Peter cited, said the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for all people, young and old, men and women, slave or free, whoever wants God in their lives; to all who want to be sure of his presence, the Spirit will come to us again and again.

And lastly, according to 1 Corinthians 12, **the Spirit is also how we know and confess that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour.** And that, on each, the living and active Spirit of God will enable each differently by giving different gifts of the Spirit as the Spirit chooses. These include utterance of wisdom or knowledge, the gift of healing, the working of power, deeds, prophecy or discernment, even speaking in tongues or interpretation of tongues. Its sole purpose is to live to our full potential for the good of the whole.

In this way, Pentecost is the day on which the church began, as a fulfilment of God's plan. And that the spirit of God is in all of us, making Jesus known and glorifying God in all that we do. God is in the world in the Church, where the Spirit of God is embodied. In this way, the church is called to be the wellspring of the living water, as John 7 says, from which the Spirit of God flows out into the world.

I know I have the gift of the Holy Spirit as a minister, the teaching elder. I am called. The Spirit enables me. Likewise, we have elders, managers, and teachers who have been called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the church. We have different gifts of service, each served by different people in our congregation. **The same Spirit gives each as the Spirit pleases for the good of the whole.**

So, on this day of Pentecost, with this story of wonder and amazement of smoke and violent wind with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as those who gathered heard the voices that spoke the glory of God, we are asked to ponder as they have, "What does this mean?" Another way to put it is, how will we respond to this story?

I wonder if it is not a call to pray, pray for the Spirit of God to fall afresh on us so that the Spirit will renew and revive our love and faith. Especially for the church here at Albany, so that we may be the church of God from whom the living water of eternal life may overflow. **And so Come Holy Spirit, Come.** Amen.