

May 23, 2021 Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:22-27,
John 15:26-27

[This the video I reference toward the end: <https://vimeo.com/552340426>]

Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Grace and peace, beloved of the Spirit, grace and peace.

The SPARK Story Bible, the one we just gave to our youngest kids, on pages 502 and 503,

begins The Holy Spirit story like this:

Jesus' disciples were celebrating a festival called Pentecost

when suddenly a strong wind blew through the house.

Everyone's hair lifted up and there was an amazing noise!

They looked at each other.

It looked like each disciple had a flame of fire touching [them], but no one was burned.

The Holy Spirit had come, just as Jesus promised!

The disciples began to speak in different languages!

Languages they'd never learned!

Stranger yet—they could understand each other!

The picture in the SPARK Story Bible is fantastic.

In the colorful comic illustrations, they've got a line of disciples across the bottom of the page.

This little flame dances above each of their heads.

Their hair and beards are literally standing up, standing on end.

And their eyes are eager, expectant.

Dear friends, I don't have words to describe how good it is to see so many of you today.

This is all part of our holy experiment.

It seems oh-so-appropriate to widen our options for worshipping together,

even in the midst of on-going pandemic.

Some weeks this summer we'll worship on Zoom, and YouTube,

And some weeks we'll add this third option: coming together outside.

So, if you are here on the parking lot, I want you to look around.

And, tech, folks, if you can, show to the group online a little of this gathered assembly.

And if you are sitting with someone else sneak a peek.

And if you are on Zoom, scroll through the faces.

And if you're on your own, grab a mirror!
I don't know if anyone's hair is standing on end,
but if you squint just so, I bet you can see the flames dancing above our heads.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

When you think of the Spirit, what images come to mind? Flame, dove, wind, fire, words, new life.

We sometimes speak of the three parts of God:

Father/mother/Creator—the first part,
Jesus, the savior, our friend and healer—the second part,
and the Holy Spirit—the third part.

The role of the Spirit is multifold—

inspiring creativity,
sustaining our every breath,
igniting new possibilities,
crossing boundaries,
speaking and understanding.

She's one who both comforts in safety,
and nudges to the edge, to the risky spots where we need to be.

She's the steady hand at our back,
the vision in our mind's eye,
the feeling in our gut and,
the voice that rises for justice or for honest testimony, even when we're scared.

That's the Holy Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

I believe it's the Holy Spirit who sustained us through this last year, 14 months of a weird, adapted life,
the Holy Spirit that tethers us across the miles, across phone lines, and computer screens.
befriending us in loneliness and isolation, holding us together.

Take a breath, dear ones, take a breath, church.

Our every breath, that's the Holy Spirit.

Three images that have been stirring me:

It's the Holy Spirit that allows us to see from new angles.

Today those in person are worshipping on the west parking lot.

We've done outdoor worship regularly for some years, but on the other side of our building.

For many of us, today we're seeing the church building from a different angle than usual,
the backside, the education wing, the boiler room is right there!

There's Spirit power in seeing things from new angles.

As you go about this week, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see from new angles.

I wonder what that prayer will yield!

What a gift that might be.

Secondly, not so many weeks ago, there was a big flurry of emails going around about this tree.

It's an Ash Tree.

The city had tagged it diseased and we'd known about it for quite a while.

Plans were being made for Bryan Kufus and a crew to come and take it down.

And then Bob Paschke, one of our facilities chairs, made some calls and learned that with some treatments
the tree could be saved.

As we worship today, our center is this ash tree.

A tree that once was nearly left for dead, but from it we've found new life, the center of our worship this
season.

That's a familiar story, isn't it?

How from our places of death, comes life, new life.

How important it is, Church, to center these places: these hard but necessary conversations, this
challenging work, this heart (h-e-a-r-t) work.

Not to sideline talk of race or public safety

the strife in the middle east or the gun violence in our cities,

but to **center** it, so that from it the Spirit can bring life.

As you go about this week, ask the Holy Spirit to help you center death *and life*.

And finally, a story.

As you know, Tuesday marks the one year anniversary of George Floyd's murder.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis, near the 3rd precinct police station,

became a hub of support and resources through the righteous Uprising and pain that followed.

As many of the buildings around them burned and helicopters churned, Holy Trinity and lots of volunteers
shared supplies, medical assistance, spiritual care, funds, rest, and food

A video was recently created to tell the story.

The video link is included in this week's Thursday Epistle.

At the start, one of their pastors, Pastor Angela Khabeb, an African American woman, tells of watching the video of George Floyd's death.

Many of you have seen it, too.

Watching that brutal killing, hearing George Floyd's cries for his mother, "undid her."

After viewing it, Pastor Angela went to find her husband who was napping.

"They murdered that man, they just murdered him," she cried.

Their kids came in, asking, "What's wrong?", "Who died?", and finally,

"Mom, was this someone we were related to?"

Pastor Angela replied "No," but then her husband interrupted, clarifying,

"Yes, we were related to him because he was a human being."

Dear ones, Church, the whole creation is groaning in labor pains.

It's by the Spirit's power that we show up, that we say, Yes, we are related, we can't look away.

We simply can't look away, for in the Spirit, we are related.

As you go about this week, ask the Holy Spirit to keep showing you how we are related,

how we can survive this much "un-doing" and

how we can show up to be part of the good and grace-filled, hard and needed, new birth – with flames dancing above us.

People of God, we pray:

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Come into every breath.

By your grace, come and make us something new. Amen.