

## “Promise of The Spirit”

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UCC at The Villages  
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*4/1 Earth Day*

Acts 2:1-21

John 14:8-27

*[Jesus said,]*

*“If [someone] loves me, [they] will keep my word,  
and [my God] will love [them],*

*and we will come to [them] and make our home with [them].”*

*John 14:23b*

Let us pray... O God,

As we grow in our faith and love of you, may we discover how you are real in our lives  
and that we can talk to you whenever we need you.

Let your promises to us come true and grant us peace.

Amen

We are coming to the end of the Easter season.

Today, the season of Pentecost begins...

The word Pentecost is a reference to the first harvest,

50 days after the first planting at the beginning of Spring.

As traditional Jewish culture had become an agrarian society by the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE,  
this was significant as a harvest ‘festival of the first fruits’.

In terms of the Christian narrative, Pentecost is the ‘first fruits’,

or the first harvest of new believers who would form the early church.

Something happened on that Day of Pentecost

as people of various nationalities received the same message,  
but in their own languages.

They would carry this message like a seed, back with them  
to plant in the land from which they came.

Something else is suggested here – God can speak to us in our own language.

No matter who we are, God is able to speak to us in ways that we understand  
as individuals and families, as churches and communities of faith,  
as societies and nations...

God can also understand each us in our uniqueness of language and experience,  
addressing one condition we all share at one time or another – being alone.

We enter the world alone, we leave it the same way.

If we’re fortunate, we have loving families that nurture us from infancy  
and provide a presence when we are at the end of our lives.

Some people deal with being alone better than others,  
transforming loneliness into solitude.

Willard, p.2

Others try to fill the void they feel with things, busy-ness,  
and with other people.

Still others isolate themselves, building tall walls to keep from being hurt.

like lyrics from Simon & Garfunkle's song, "I Am a Rock" –

*I've built walls; A fortress steep and mighty*

*That none may penetrate...*

*Hiding in my room; Safe within my womb*

*I touch no one, and no one touches me*

*I am a rock; I am an island*

*And a rock feels no pain; And an island never cries*

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/i-am-a-rock-lyrics-simon-and-garfunkel.html>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran theologian and WWII martyr, wrote,

*"Let him who cannot be alone beware of community...*

*Let him who is not in community beware of being alone...*

<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/168889-life-together-the-classic-exploration-of-faith-in-community>

This means we are always in tension between solitude & community –  
between longing and belonging.

To find a balance for these tensions in your life is to have 'peace'.

After Jesus' crucifixion, his disciples hid in the upper room

which according to tradition, was the same room where they had celebrated  
their last supper with him.

Our Gospel lesson today was Jesus' farewell discourse –

his last message to them before the events of his trial and death,  
including this promise:

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you;  
not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.' [John 14:27]

In the Gospel of Luke 24, Jesus also told them,

'Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'

Three days after his crucifixion, Jesus would again appear to his disciples  
as they hid in that same upper room.

Though it had been locked, the resurrected Christ stood before them, saying,  
"Shalom, shalom! Peace be with you!"

According to tradition, Jesus continued to meet and teach his disciples  
for 40 days before ascending into Heaven.

On the day of Pentecost the disciples were gathered once again in the upper room,  
waiting for some indication of what to do next.

At last they were 'clothed with power from on high'

as the Holy Spirit visited them as a life-giving wind and illuminating fire.

Willard, p.3

That 'power' was the Spirit of God's love

opening lines of communication at the heart level between God and humanity,  
and bringing individual people together like a Spiritual "internet".

This network of communication is facilitated by the in-dwelling Spirit of truth  
which is what prayer is.

So, the promise of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus words,

"I will not leave you desolate, I will come to you" is fulfilled.

That promise of power and peace was realized for those people back then  
and continues to be available to us now.

To take the Bible literally can limit the discussion to  
belief about whether or not the events described happened.

As progressive Christians we have to take into account  
the mechanisms and dynamics that we find at work in the Bible stories.

Then, we can see how the Pharisees and disciples are still alive today,  
not only active in group dynamics, but even in our own hearts.

We can recognize mechanisms between the lines of the Bible  
at work in everyday life, like scape-goating, self-righteousness,  
and spiritual blindness.

But we can also find the dynamics of the Holy Spirit at work  
as courage in the face of debilitating illness,  
obstinacy in the face of social prejudice and  
perseverance to meet injustice.

We can find healing that comes from vision and discipline,  
salvation that comes from asking the question that needs to be asked,  
and joy from finding purpose and meaning in life,  
and that the world really does operate by cause and effect  
and a beloved community is possible.

There is hope for the world when you realize you are not on your own,  
but connected to a purpose bigger than yourself,  
and that such a purpose may call for self-sacrifice,  
but makes no demand on harming others to prove you're right.

We are seeing God's promises steadily being fulfilled  
which the Apostle Peter quoted from the Hebrew Bible...

God has given the Holy Spirit to everyone –

to women as well as men of the next generation,

to young people who are seeing visions, just as their elders did,  
to whomever is willing to serve God, regardless of their gender,  
continuing to proclaim God's message of redemptive love .

Willard, p.4

At the Last Supper when Philip asks him, “Show us [God] the Father”,  
Jesus answers with a confusing formula of  
the interconnectedness of God and Christ himself.

These things are a mystery as to what they actually mean,  
but what is suggested is that Jesus is connected with that aspect of God  
that can hear and understand, and communicate with us  
not only through our spoken language,  
but through who we are of body, mind, and spirit.

We can celebrate that we are like those people in the Bible of so long ago  
who have a relationship with the Great Mystery we call God.

As we enter the season of Pentecost at the conclusion of Eastertide,  
once again, we have told the story of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection,  
the triumph of God’s love over sin and death.

Pentecost is the season of discovering how God shows up  
in the world and in our lives,

and that the God of love we meet through Christ is real,  
proven in the baptism of fire that is our life experience.

That’s the message that those first disciples would take back with them  
on their mission to the world,

as they faced the lions’ den or just plain indifference,  
until they finally found acceptance and the joy of others’ discovery  
that God is real and still at work in the world.

Friends, let us go and do likewise.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Acts 2:1-2, tells the story of how the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Church...*

- 2:1 On the day of Pentecost all the Lord's followers  
were together in one place.
- 2 Suddenly there was a noise from heaven  
like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting.
- 3 Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions,  
and a tongue came and settled on each person there.
- 4 The Holy Spirit took control of everyone,  
and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak.
- 5 Many religious Jews from every country in the world were living in Jerusalem.  
6 And when they heard this noise, a crowd gathered.  
But they were surprised, because they were hearing everything  
in their own languages.
- 7 They were excited and amazed, and said:  
Don't all these who are speaking come from Galilee?  
8 Then why do we hear them speaking our very own languages?  
9 Some of us are from Parthia, Media, and Elam.  
Others are from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia,  
10 Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya near Cyrene, Rome,  
11 Crete, and Arabia. Some of us were born Jews,  
and others of us have chosen to be Jews.  
Yet we all hear them using our own languages to tell the wonderful things  
God has done.
- 12 Everyone was excited and confused. Some of them even kept asking each other,  
"What does all this mean?"
- 13 Others made fun of the Lord's followers and said,  
"They are drunk."
- 14 Peter stood with the eleven apostles and  
spoke in a loud and clear voice to the crowd:  
Friends and everyone else living in Jerusalem,  
listen carefully to what I have to say!
- 15 You are wrong to think that these people are drunk.  
After all, it is only nine o'clock in the morning.
- 16 But this is what God had the prophet Joel say,  
17 "When the last days come, I will give my Spirit to everyone.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.  
Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams.
- 18 In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants,  
both men and women, and they will prophesy.
- 19 I will work miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below.  
There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke.
- 20 The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood  
before the great and wonderful day of the Lord appears.
- 21 Then the Lord will save everyone who asks for his help."

John 14:8-27 [RSV]

[8] Philip said to him, "Lord, show us [God], and we shall be satisfied."

[9] Jesus said to him,

"Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip?

He who has seen me has seen [God];

how can you say, `Show us [God]?

[10] Do you not believe that I am in [God]and [God is]in me?

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority;

but [God]who dwells in me does his works.

[11] Believe me that I am in [God]and [God is]in me;

or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

[12] "Truly, truly, I say to you, [the one] who believes in me

will also do the works that I do;

and greater works than these will [they]do, because I go to [God].

[13] Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it,

that [God]may be glorified in the Son;

[14] if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

[15] "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

[16] And I will pray [God], and [God] will give you another Counselor,

to be with you for ever,

[17] even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,

because it neither sees [the Spirit]nor knows him; you know [the Spirit],

for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

[18] "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.

[19] Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more,

but you will see me; because I live, you will live also.

[20] In that day you will know that I am in my [God],

and you in me, and I in you.

[21] [The one] who has my commandments and keeps them,

[is the one] who loves me; and [the one]who loves me

will be loved by my [God],

and I will love [them] and manifest myself to [them]."

[22] Judas (not Iscariot) said to him,

"Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

[23] Jesus answered him,

"If [someone] loves me, [they] will keep my word, and my [God] will love [them],

and we will come to [them] and make our home with [them].

[24] [Those] who [do] not love me [do] not keep my words;

and the word which you hear is not mine but [of God] who sent me.

[25] "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you.

[26] But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom [God] will send

in my name, [...] will teach you all things,

and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

[27] Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you;

not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.