

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?”

<sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and

fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

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Pentecost is always celebrated 50 days after Easter. Its roots are in the Jewish harvest festival, Feast of Weeks, which the Greek speaking Jewish community called “Pentecost” and which was held 50 days after Passover. Today’s reading from Acts tells the story of Pentecost, as it is remembered and celebrated in our tradition.

It seems the disciples were still lying low 50 days after Jesus’s crucifixion. We are told “they were all together in one place” when the sound of a mighty wind filled the house they were in and filled them with the Holy Spirit. This Spirit gave them voice, in all its meanings. This “voice” manifested itself not only in an ability to speak in various world languages, but the Spirit-given voice gave them the courage to leave their fears behind and speak publicly about the Truth they had learned in their time with Jesus Christ.

This Pentecost story is the story of the church’s birth.

While we can never really know how the disciples felt, hiding in that room, I am certain there was a sense of dread and foreboding, fearing that what had happened to Jesus could happen to them. They had no desire to be hung on a cross or even beaten by the Romans or the Jewish leadership.

Still, in the midst of the lost hope they had placed in Jesus, they continued to gather together to comfort and support one another. It was in this gathering of diverse persons – former fishermen and tax collectors, rebels and establishment types, moneyed and poor, men and women called and held together by the message of Jesus – it was in this gathering that the Holy Spirit rested on each of them.

What happened to those gathered together and how they responded caused a crowd to ask, “What does this mean?” A question still relevant today.

It might be a stretch for me to say that our present situation here in the United States is comparable to what the disciples felt. When they watched Jesus ascend and depart, they were left feeling confused and fearful. The disciples’ confused and fearful uncertainty, just before the coming of the Holy Spirit, reminded me a lot of what many are feeling today.

People describe these days as divisive; some fear diversity is more destructive than good; some are fearful of never returning to the office, while others fear having to return; some fear being shot, while others fear loss of safety if their guns are taken away; some people just want to hide away from the tension of it all.

The more divisive things become in our country, the more I am convinced the Pentecost story has significance for us all. Fearful of the divisions in their country and the personal threats to their lives, the disciples gathered together, comforted one another, and patiently waited. At the time, they were in the dark, not knowing the future, but they continued on as best they could.

If we want to see the divisions in our country healed, then, like the diverse group of disciples, we too must gather together – left and right, majority and minority, gun advocate and regulation advocate, right to life and pro-choice, in other words, **everyone** together – and seek to see the humanity in one another.

This is actually part of the Pentecost story. When the Spirit rested on them, the disciples suddenly understood the humanity of those different from themselves. They actually spoke their language! And knowing another’s language is a great step forward in understanding the person who is different from you.

And what did they share with friend and foe alike? The unifying message of Jesus Christ: love one another. This message is the core of the gospel, the foundation for creating and maintaining a healthy community. Until we begin to embody this message, there will be no end to the divisiveness that is destroying all of us.

It took great courage on the disciples’ part to step out of hiding and publicly share a message of love that many in the world did not want to hear. It crossed cultural, social and geo-political barriers which were maintaining the status quo.

It requires no less courage today for people to reach across the divide with a welcoming love. The fear on both sides is great: “I don’t want to be taken advantage of.” “My friends might think I’ve sold out.” “They are so different. I find them revolting.” “They are so different. They scare me.”

Here is the Truth the Holy Spirit filled and enlivened the disciples with: Love defeated death. Love is the most powerful force in the universe. There is no reason to fear, if you act out of love.

I firmly believe it is Edgewood Church’s goal and desire to teach this Truth and to live out this Truth – within our particular church community, with any who enter our building, and hopefully, with all whom each one of us encounters every day.

You don’t have to like the other; you don’t have to always agree with them, if ever. But we must learn to love, as God loves us. It is my prayer that we will to do so, too. For, according to Jimi Hendrix: When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.

May God’s Spirit rest on each one of us, as we seek to trust in and give voice to God’s life-giving love each and every day. Amen.