

**Sermon** May 19, 2024  
[John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15]

*Pentecost's Gifts*  
Pastor Kristy Daniels, COSL

Well, here we gather this day to celebrate Pentecost, and we use the color red to remind us that today is about the Holy Spirit; and they use red as a symbolism of the flames that appeared over the disciples' heads. We don't use red very often in the church calendar year, because we don't talk about the Holy Spirit very often. But here we are celebrating, and I do mean celebrating, because this also marks the birthday of the Church.

So, I haven't taken a poll. But I would guess that this would be my congregation's favorite day of the church calendar year, because it's the Church's birthday, and what does that mean? Hey, yes, cake! And my congregation *loves* cake. I don't know if you guys are getting cake. *We* are. So, tonight at 6:30, if anybody missed out today.

The readings for today, especially from the Gospel of John: confusing, right? Yeah, John likes to kind of weave us around in all these circular patterns, and my Bible studiers are always like, "What?"

But the heart of this matter is, Jesus is promising his disciples, and encouraging them, that they will never be alone. They will receive the Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit will continue with them, comforting them, guiding them, nourishing them, advocating for them. And today we celebrate that giving of the Spirit and the receiving of the gifts.

What is remarkable about this gift, and what I find very comforting is, that everyone heard the good news in their own language, in the language of their heart. Not as their second or third language, not in tongues that they couldn't understand and somebody had to interpret for them. They heard it in the *language of their heart*, the language [where] they understood the words and their deeper meanings.

And why is this so comforting? Because it reminds me that our God is a loving God that came for every one, and that this gift of God's Word is so important, and so profound, and so life-giving, that everyone needs to hear it in the way that they can understand, these words are for you.

They receive the Spirit, and with it they receive – *not* my favorite part of the church – and I've been here enough, you guys probably know what this is – anybody?

They received the great "kick-out-the-door," out into the world, to continue the work that Jesus has begun.

Why do I say it's not my favorite part? I am an introvert. I would just as soon *not* go out into the world and declare the good news! You say, "But you're a Pastor!" But for me, it's about relationships. And I go knowing, and I come here knowing, that I come not alone. A Holy Spirit is with me. A Holy Spirit is here in this place, opening our ears so that we hear what we need to hear. Strengthening us in ways that we don't always

understand or value. Affirming, confirming, and delighting us, in ways that are unbelievable on our own.

I shared in the morning service, this morning after Bible study – we do Bible study now online at night; it's a whole different group than what I normally have at church – but *two people* went out of their way to talk with me about the Holy Spirit, because I guess they were too uncomfortable to talk about it in class. And it's *the Holy Spirit* that allows them to continue in faith. They don't understand "God the Father Creator." They've never met Jesus in the flesh. But they can believe in this Spirit, that speaks to them, in the small voice, or in the beauty of creation, or through others, offering God's gifts of love and forgiveness and mercy and grace.

That Holy Spirit, a wild thing: You never know where it's going to call you, and what gifts are going to be yours. And I am guessing that you don't recognize all the gifts that you have; and I also believe, that you would get rid of some of those gifts if you had the choice. Right? We want to choose where we go and what we do. And sometimes the gifts arise in our life out of hardship and turmoil. That's why I'm saying: you might not want that gift. But your life journey might have brought, percolating, the gift of compassion and understanding, so that others can be seen and heard and valued. The gift of this life might have given you the gift of patience. And if you have that, I'd love to see you at Church of Steadfast Love, because that is not my gift. Infinite amounts of patience, to be, to wait, to know that God is there, present, and will call you into action at the right time.

Because we believe and we confess that in the waters of baptism, you are put to death and raised to new life and gifted as children of God. Not just for our own sakes, but for the sake of community, and all of creation. As our Psalm response for today (that was so beautiful I didn't even join in the singing because I just wanted to listen) said, "Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth." Did you all hear that, while you were singing? What did you think?

Because I was thinking, "Aw, shoot!" Anybody else? [*laughter*]

Because I heard God's word in that: that *I* have the Holy Spirit, and I am sent out into the world to renew the face of the earth. We're not relying on the Spirit, this magical wind, to go out there and do it all on its own. That Spirit works in us, and through us, to do God's work out in the world. It opens our hearts. It opens our eyes. It opens our ears. It guides our hands. It inspires others. It causes us to ponder, and question, and act.

So where do you hear the Spirit calling you in your life, individually? Where do you feel that Spirit calling to you as this community, or the community of your choir, individually and together? Or do you feel we are being called as the larger church out into the world, and what is our part in that?

It will require us to let things go; require us to take things on. I'm going to give you just a few moments to ponder it...

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So, you might not know this about the Church of Steadfast Love. We are a really small congregation. And we have a somewhat erratic pastor. We don't always have a musician, and we no longer have church on Wednesdays, so we've been doing our "Wednesday church service" whenever we don't have a musician on Sundays. And I have to say, it's the scariest part of ministry I have ever done since I've been a pastor – and I just celebrated my 20th year at the Synod Assembly. There's no sermon in "Word and Prayer," but I decided I would put one in, and I give a, you know, a little synopsis on the readings, and then say, "What do *you* think?"

So, what do you think?

Now I know you're all Lutherans – most of the congregation, well, you're not maybe *all* Lutherans. I know a lot of you here *are* Lutherans, and Lutherans are very shy – for those of you who don't know, they don't like to speak out publicly. But *my* congregation didn't mostly grow up Lutheran, so they're more keen on asking me tough questions, and doing things like that.

So, what do you think? Did you have questions come up? Do you want to share them out loud, or do you want to keep them to yourself? I open the floor up for just a moment...

*I thought you were raising your hand... that was very close. You're all looking down now... Sally looks like she wants to fire a question at me... [the silence of shy Lutherans]*

Okay, well here maybe this is less intimidating: Who recognizes a gift in someone else here, that maybe goes unacknowledged, or they haven't seen for themselves? Do you want to share it out loud, so they now have been acknowledged?

*[the silence of shy Lutherans continues]*

Oh, Lutherans! *Lutherans!!*

Well, *I* see the Spirit active and moving in this congregation. I see how much you work to provide this healing gift of music, out into the community, how you value it, how it strengthens you. I see it in the education that you provide. I see it in the welcome that you give to me, and to my congregation, and to others in the community. I've seen it as visitors, who come to this church, and how the doors are flung wide for them so that they can come and fully participate in the body of Christ, as it is meant to be. Where we all come, just as we are, and get to *be* the gift that God created us to be: a part of the

body of Christ. Where we get to share in the meal, a body broken and the blood poured out, and where we are all sent out into the world to continue the work that Jesus had begun.

This Pentecost celebration, we get to talk really about *both* of our sacraments. The meal – the body broken and the blood poured out – and the gift of baptism, where we received that Holy Spirit, where we are put to death in the waters and brought to new life.

And that made me think of my *Small Catechism* and the third article of the Creed, so I'm just gonna read it to you:

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

You say that almost every week, but do you hear it, still? Because we say it almost every week. This is what Luther says:

“What does this mean?”

“I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with these gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, day after day, he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day, he will raise me and all the dead, and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

This is most certainly true.”

What a beautiful thing: that the Holy Spirit remains active within us, around us, and through us, assuring us of the gift of forgiveness and the promise of salvation. A reminder that our God is a God for *all* creation, unwilling to let any go: forgotten, forsaken, shunned, or isolated. In God, there is room for you.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.