

## Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

### Title: What Is Pentecost?

### Lesson: Acts 2:1-21 NRSV

<sup>2</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.’

Today is Pentecost Sunday. As you see in the sanctuary, red is the color of Pentecost. Pentecost has two meanings. First, Pentecost is a big Jewish holiday to commemorate that Moses received the ten commandments from God on Mount Sinai. Second, Pentecost is a day that the Lord poured out

His Spirit upon all flesh with tongues of fire. Pentecost was already a meaningful day as the day Moses received the law from God, but it became even more meaningful as the day the Holy Spirit came. From that day the early Christian church began. Therefore, Pentecost is also known as the birthday of the church. Pentecost is a very significant day. So, let's see what Pentecost means for us today.

According to Genesis, back then the world had one language and a common speech. One day they settled on a proper place and began to make bricks, and they planned to build a wonderful city for themselves with a tower that reaches to the heavens. They wanted to be equal with God, perhaps more powerful than God. God saw their wicked hearts as their arrogance, greed, and selfishness. So, God confused their language. They couldn't carry out any of their plans because they didn't understand each other. We can get a lesson from the Tower of Babel that just like human greed, selfishness, arrogance, and an evil heart led to the severance of relationships and misunderstandings. I'm mentioning this story because unlike this story Pentecost is a story in which different languages are connected, communicated, and relationships are recovered with the help of the Holy Spirit.

As I mentioned, Pentecost was a huge Israel holiday at the time. You could imagine how people feel on holiday. Monday was Memorial Day, and after Memorial Service at Calvary Cemetery in Deer Park, I went with my family to Lake Altoona Park in Eau Claire for a Barbeque lunch with Korean pastors. It was crowded and people enjoyed their barbecues and music there, and many young people seemed to enjoy their youth on the beach. Everyone seemed happy. I imagine Pentecost was a happy holiday for Israelites like Memorial Day.

At that time, Jerusalem had a lot of events to commemorate Pentecost, so a lot of people gathered. Among the crowd there were Jesus' disciples and their families. Most of them were from Galilee. Galilee was a town that Jesus loved and blessed because there were many people who needed God's love and comfort, such as the poor, the marginalized. So, Jesus sent his disciples to Galilee after his resurrection. When Jesus' disciples and their families came to Jerusalem, people probably already knew that the disciples were from Galilee through their shabby clothes and different accents.

Jerusalem is located almost in the middle of Israel. And Galilee is in the north of Israel. Galilee had a lot of connections with Palestine culturally, so their accent was slightly different from Jerusalem people.

Korea is a small country, but even that small country has various accents. Generally speaking, the accent of people of Seoul is the standard, and the southern, eastern, and middle regions all have their own accents. In the past, there was a big difference in each accent, but these days the difference seems to have decreased with the development of media. I learned that even in the US there are differences in accents depending on the region, is that true? Likewise, the accent of the people of Jerusalem and the people of Galilee were slightly different. So the people in Jerusalem could recognize that the disciples were from Galilee.

By the way, Acts 2:1-4 describes an amazing miracle happened: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. (1) 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. (2) Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. (3) All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (4)

If we think of that as today's language, they spoke English, German, French, Korean, Spanish, Chinese, and so on, not Hebrew. At that time, not only Israelites, but also people of privileged classes from various countries participated in the events of Pentecost in Jerusalem. But, they could understand what the disciples were saying. Verses 7-8 says "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native languages?" The people in Jerusalem knew that Jesus' disciples were from Galilee, so they were surprised when they spoke a foreign language fluently because people had a prejudice against the Galileans that they were very poor and uneducated.

But some ignored the disciples and sneered saying, "They are filled with new wine." Then, Peter began to explain what happened to them to the doubters. He preached about the Holy Spirit's arrival, asking back, "these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning."  
(15)

It was amazing to see Peter preaching to people about the Holy Spirit because when Jesus was alive, Peter had a lot of fears and even betrayed Jesus. However, as he met the resurrected Jesus, his fears began to slowly turn into convictions. Finally, he overcame his fears by faith and bravely delivered Joel's prophecies to the people. He said: "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." (17)

At the time, young children, young people, and old people were the most marginalized. They were even marginalized from the law and the Jewish faith tradition. But one of the reasons that this Pentecost story described in Acts says when the Holy Spirit touches their hearts and minds, their lives change, and they shall prophesy, they shall see visions, and they shall dream dreams.

Friends, if the Tower of Babel is the story that human greed, selfishness, and evil cause severance and misunderstanding in relationships, then Pentecost is the story that the Lord, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit forgives and saves all human sins, transforms their lives, and restores the severance of relationships. For this peace, love, and grace, Jesus came to this earth, died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

Whenever I watch the news, I feel that there are so many tragic accidents in the world. People still build their Tower of Babel. But we must remember the lesson from the story of Tower of Babel that human greed, arrogance, selfishness, and wicked hearts lead severance of relationships and misunderstandings. We joined in the communion this morning. As I often say, the communion is breakfast with God and all of us are invited to the Lord's table as His children, and we are brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope that you will light up this dark world with the love and forgiveness of the Lord. And I believe that as children of God, we can all stay in the love and love our neighbors as ourselves. May the Holy Spirit be with us and pour out His grace upon all of us, so we overcome our greed, selfishness, fears, and sins and light up the darkness of the world. Amen.