

Texts: Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Subject: Gifts of the Spirit

Theme: All We Need

Sunday of Pentecost; May 31, 2020, Online Worship; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

Did you see it? Did you see the video? Did you hear the voice of George Floyd crying out for his life? 'I can't breathe' were the words that came out as the weight of the officer's knee drove into his neck. Did you watch as he cried out for his mother? as he asked for water? as he told them he was dying? How can our hearts not break, how can we not be angry? Our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton wrote this week that "until a white majority feels so deeply in our soul that the pain of black and brown people is our own pain, it will continue to be dangerous to be black or brown in America." All we need is to see the pain of others and claim it as our own pain. Is that possible? Can we even imagine a future where racism has become extinct? Why do we continue deny it, to rationalize it, and accept it? What will it take for real change to come to our nation? We can be angry about blocked streets, about those who criticize police, about wearing a mask in public, about looting and property destruction, but many fail to get angry enough about the murder of a fellow American - one of our own siblings in Christ - George Floyd, "a man of peace." That's how his friends and family knew him. And maybe some of us are angry, and we don't know what to do so we wring our hands, we say a prayer, and then move on to the next thing on our list. We get complacent - I know, because I do it too.

So, people are angry; they are hurting, and they are in the street to let the world know it. They are angry in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington D.C., Los

Angeles, Denver, Reno, Las Vegas, and more. What will it take to wake us up from sleep, to use the tools we have to bring about lasting change? The way I see it - We can work for a new future, or have it thrust upon us. We can welcome it, and adapt, or get left behind. God is all about doing new things, and the Spirit of transformation is at work.

We've felt it already, and it makes us uneasy. Nearly six months in and we can say this year has not turned out the way we had hoped. So many are struggling because they are out of work, we have been quarantined in our homes, unable to gather with the ones we love for prom, graduations, birthdays, funerals, weddings, worship, and more. We are still dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 virus - we didn't forget that. And people are already on their last nerve, and the summer heat has arrived in our city. It is a tenuous time. This is the time when real change can take root.

There in Jerusalem, the people were gathered for the celebration, fifty days after the Passover, They came from all over - they were a diverse group, a motley crew of faithful folx from throughout the region. They had their different traditions, languages and understandings. The Spirit fell on all of them - without qualification or questioning, but immediately drew these people into understanding, if only for a moment - and into a power that came from outside themselves, that bound them together as one. Peter stood up and spoke, to share the good news of Jesus. Not everybody got it - some stood back and scoffed - called them agitators, accused them of being drunk, and wouldn't accept the message. But for those who did, they would become the church - the people of God, and 3,000 were baptized into the body of Christ. *All they needed* was that power that activated faith in them, to open their eyes and ears, to see one another and listen to each other, and they were transformed.

Is that all we need? Come Holy Spirit, Come!

This is the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and we wear our red and sing about flames of fire and this power that God has given to each of us. It shows up in us in different ways. Not all of us are evangelists, not all are eloquent preachers. Some are powerful prayers, others are gifted for hospitality, some for serving and singing, others are wiser than most, many are gifted to be generous. We respond differently to the spirit as she activates the gifts we have. We know we are different, and here in this church we rejoice in our diversity! We need the preachers and the prophets, the servants, teachers and leaders in all their variety. We give thanks for the ones who see things differently, who have the courage to speak out and be different, and share new ideas and we welcome one another to join in this mission we have to share the heart of Christ in the heart of the city. All are needed here to make this ministry happen.

We are one body with many members. Not all the same. Is this good news? It seems that some cannot accept this, and would hold themselves above others. The idea that white people have more value than people of color is called white supremacy - it is evil and it is a sin. We know that, and so we deny it. We claim it doesn't exist. We are ashamed that we have perpetuated systems of injustice, allowed an imbalance of power to go unchecked for far too long, and upheld unjust standards of behavior, expression, and existence of black indigenous people of color that have led to generational trauma in our country over the last 400 years. No, not our great, great grandparents, not the pilgrims, or Lutheran immigrants from 100 years ago - we have been a part of this pain that so many live under.

I was in the lunchroom with my friends in middle school, when I repeated some racist joke I had heard. I still remember the face of my friend Van, who was light skinned with freckles, and the shame I felt that I had failed to see this young black man right there at the table with me. I didn't even see him. I never forgot it. Maybe I'm the only one who has a story like that, but I suspect there are others. If we cannot see those who are members of the body, how can we begin to see Jesus?

What are we waiting for? Maybe we think we need a revival. Maybe we think we just need the right politician in office. Maybe we think we need a revolution? All we need is all around us. We have been gifted by God, we have been given the same spirit that binds the Father and Son in love, the same spirit that conceived the baby in Mary's womb, the same spirit of healing that Jesus breathed on the first disciples, the same spirit power that resurrected our Lord from the grave, and yet we choose to hoard it and hide it and lash out in anger at each other. We bicker and fight and destroy, until the fear we have felt and the pain we have inflicted erupt into destruction.

I believe we are all in for a change. That powerful holy spirit that is blowing in me and you is leading us into a new way of being, and we have got to get out of our own way or else we will miss out on so much. Yes, our congregation will continue, yes we will worship together again, and we will serve neighbors and feed people and fight homelessness, and live and work together. In a few weeks we'll get together for a meeting and we will very likely still be online and in front of screens as we talk about the future of our church here in downtown Las Vegas. We have opportunities to welcome others and to grow and share and serve, and we want to be ready. I hope you'll be praying for your pastors and our church council as we get ready for our annual meeting.

As we await whatever comes next, as we make plans for safe worship gatherings, as we struggle to make sense of the world around us in the next few weeks and months, we pray together. We pray that all would be safe, healthy, and wise. But most of all, I want us to call on the holy spirit to activate the gifts in us, and awaken us for new life again, and to help us to imagine again what we can be. We have so many gifts among us. These gifts are not for ourselves, but for a world that is clearly hurting, that is full of folk who are sick of suffering and in need of hope and help and a future. And I believe that as a church, we have so much to give, and that we have all we need right here and now to make that happen.

We have the Word. The spirit activates faith in us, opens our ears to hear it, and welcome it in our lives. Faith grows in us, molds us into something else, calls us to repentance, and changes our hearts. We have the Word of God. We have Jesus, our Lord, the one who, by the power of the Spirit came to suffer with us, who died for us, who battled the powers of death and hell, and now rules with justice and equity, even when we are unable to see Him. We have Jesus. And, we have the promise of the Comforter. The Spirit binds us to Jesus and makes us ALL one in Christ. It makes us into a family - even a dysfunctional one - whether we like it or not. The Spirit of comfort and healing, this Advocate carries our prayers even when we cannot speak them to God who knows us, hears us, and gracefully heals us.

What will it take? What do we need?

We need each other. We need to see each other to see Jesus. We need the gifts of God for a world in pain. ALL WE HAVE IS ALL WE NEED. *All we need* is to hear this good news of Jesus. *All we need* is for all to know we are all one in Christ. *All we need*

is the cross to know that we do not suffer alone and the promise of resurrection, transformation, and new life is ours.

Let us pray:

Grant, O God, that your holy and life giving Spirit may move every human heart; that the barriers dividing us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; and that, with our divisions healed, we might live in justice and in peace; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (*ELW, Occasional Services for the Assembly, p.398*)

Amen.