

*Texts: Acts 2:1-21; Gal. 4:1-7, 5:16-26*

*Subject: The Coming of the Spirit/Fruit of the Spirit*

*Theme: This is Us*

*Sunday of Pentecost, May 23, 2021; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

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

Happy Birthday, Church! Yes, we remember this day of Pentecost as the beginning of the church on earth. This was when the Holy Spirit came to unite the people into one, to allow them to hear and understand one another as they gave witness to God's glory and the saving power of Jesus death and resurrection for all. This power of God fell on all of them there in Jerusalem as they gathered fifty days after the Passover, and began something new in them. They struggled to understand it of course, but Peter spoke, using the words of the prophet Joel, to explain how they were beloved and empowered by God, who had known and chosen them, who was carrying out the divine mission in Jesus, the Son. This would inspire them to look around and realize that God's power was moving again in a new way, drawing them together for a purpose, and calling them to share the good news of God's salvation - to be prophets themselves, and to be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

That's a party! That's a reason to celebrate!

I don't know if that's what you expected when you set foot in this church - whether it was 50 years ago or more, or a year and a half ago, or maybe you've never physically set foot in here, but are gathered with us today online - *this is us!* This is our story. We are a part of that same gathering of people in Jerusalem that day - we are heirs of this same power of God - we've received in baptism, and it makes us into the Church - with a capital 'C' - the body of Christ in the world. Yes, *this is us.*

What is this Spirit that we have been given?

We can tend to think of things that are spiritual as less than real, intangible, like a ghost or an idea. Many people today consider themselves “Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR).” Lutheran pastor and author Nadia Bolz-Weber, has written that she is much more religious than she is spiritual. I took this to mean she’s more about what is real, and finds great meaning in the liturgy and ritual and lived practice of her faith. Paul reminds us today that all that is spiritual is not separated from what is real and right in front of us. This Spirit is in us and with us. But how do we know it’s real? How can we see it, feel it, and recognize it? It was Saint Augustine that described the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son - the first and second persons of the trinity, and the bond between the human and divine in Jesus. It’s also the bond of love between us and God, that power that makes us all a part of God’s family.

One of the most powerful images we have for the deeply relational love of God in our lives is that of the family. And we know our families are not perfect. They might even be a source of pain or frustration for us at times. Families are messy. Probably because they’re made up of people, who come from different places, and join together and bring their own experiences, pain and fear and trauma along for the ride. As parents we tend to think we’ve created little copies of ourselves, and that they should think and act and behave as we do. I think that’s pretty rare. As our kids have grown up, I’m less interested in them being like me than I am seeing them discover the gifts they have received, watching them learn about the world around them, form their own ideas, and dream their own dreams. Maybe their mother and I get to pass on a few good things to them, like humor, responsibility, compassion, and kindness. But they are their own

people, separate from us, a piece of our own hearts running around in the world. They inspire me to be brave, and to be honest, and to be fully present and alive with them.

This is how God sees each of us - little bits of God's own heart running around the kingdom, in need of help, guidance, direction, correction, and most of all patience, grace, and love. The bond of love between our heavenly parent and each child of God is never broken. The Spirit connects us to the one who created us.

Paul was teaching the church in Galatia of their identity in Christ - he warned them against submitting to the law again, and reminded them of the freedom that they had received in Jesus. He names them as part of the family - heirs of the promises of Christ. Another Lutheran pastor Dave Daubert describes it something like this:

What God is, Jesus is.

What Jesus has, He gives to us.

Jesus the Son, called on God as Father, with a nearness and intimacy that can sometimes be missing in our own parent-child relationships, but nonetheless demonstrates how we have been called in close to God, through the love of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit - *the bond of love*.

Like children we struggle to be something separate - to differentiate ourselves from the ones who made us. Human beings get influenced by the world, and follow the desires that are in us, the things that feed our egos. We go after things that we think we want but are unhelpful. We take things that are good and overindulge, causing harm to ourselves and to others. We push at the boundaries of God's law and just plain old human decency as we grow. Paul writes, "the works of the flesh are obvious." We know what they are - they are the things that are not a part of the character of the divine. They

are the things that tempt us away from love, from service, from faith. They are the things that injure us when we are on the receiving end of someone's selfishness. Drunkenness and carousing sound like fun, but they don't get us anywhere. Jealousy and anger cannot heal us. Lack of moral restraint leaves us empty. Seeking life from things that cannot give it only stunts our growth.

Paul warns against these things but gives the promise that God's Spirit brings that which really gives abundant life. God's **love** enables us to love others, to build up and not tear down; to receive love and feel **joy** and to bring that to others creates **peace**, and makes us peacemakers. **Patience** and **kindness** create space for healing and relationship and community. **Generosity** and **faithfulness** lead to new opportunities and move us forward, they are creative and not destructive. **Gentleness** and **self-control** are qualities of caregivers, servants who make life better for those around them.

*This is us.*

We who have been given the great gift of God's Holy Spirit have been brought to faith, have been baptized, and reconciled into the loving arms of God, are made new, made for a reason, made for others. These fruits of the Spirit are gifts for use in the world here and now. They are not badges we carry with us to heaven.

We know the pain of the world. People are hot and hurting and homeless. They are in need of work and safety and dignity. They are sick and facing mental illness. They are isolated and lonely. They are overwhelmed and anxious.

Just as I showed up at church yesterday to prepare for worship, I saw two guys sleeping under the bushes out front. They had no safe place to rest. They were able to

get some water and snacks, and go on their way. Some of our church family showed up here to serve, too. James was working on some of the planters out front. Alfie was here to help clean up and paint the walls. Pastor Matt brought his son Jeremiah to come and offer prayers in this refreshed worship space. The Spirit is at work. She's guiding us, empowering us, inspiring us and leading us to serve.

*This is us.* We are God's children. Heirs of the promise, receivers of God's grace and the redeeming love of the Lord. We have the Spirit with us, bonding us together to make us one people, one body, not separate, but interconnected and interdependent. We are not separate from those who suffer homelessness in our streets or from families facing violence in the Middle East, or from neighbors wondering how to pay their bills, or from our siblings of color who face daily discrimination or from LGBTQIA+ kids who have been thrown out of their homes, or from those who disagree with our political outlook. We are one body, gifted by God, called to create and give and heal, and to be faithful.

So I want us all to claim these gifts for the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Claim them, for each of us and for our community, these gifts that have been given to us and placed within us - and begin again this birthday of the church. I want each of you here to know that you are a part of this family of God, and no matter who you were before, or what you've been through, you have been blessed and born anew through water and the Word, in the power of God, and drawn into the heart of Christ for a reason and a purpose. We use these gifts to teach and to serve, to show up when our friends and neighbors need us, to be of good use, to create memories and movements and more little humans like

us. The Spirit of life is at work in the world and in us. It frees us from self-centeredness, and evokes faith and love within us. This is freedom to follow where God is leading.

*This is us.*

Amen.