



PENTECOST

Come, Holy Spirit

May 31, 2020
North Congregational Church
New Hartford, Connecticut

WORSHIP FOR THE TWELFTH TIME
THAT WE ARE NOT GATHERING IN OUR SANCTUARY
BECAUSE WE WISH TO HONOR THE NEED FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING
IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS

FOR YOUR MEDITATION

For as many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for you are one in Christ Jesus. -Galatians 3:27-28

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

It is normally our custom when we gather to extend the Peace of Christ to one another. Even though we are physically apart at this time, may you know that peace.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Come, Holy Spirit, come, into the hearts of your people.
like a dove, like wind, like flame.
Like a dove,
find a resting place in our land and around the world, bringing hope and peace.
Like a wind,
swirl around and among us, blow throughout our land and around the world, bringing
new ideas that will benefit the common good
Like a flame,
rise up in the hearts of the people of our land and nations around the world, fuel the
passions of us, your servants, to reach out with love and justice, fanning the embers when
enthusiasm wanes.
Come, Holy Spirit, come,
Breathe into the hearts of us, your people, like a dove, like a wind, like a flame.
Fill us with your empowering strength,
to go into the world proclaiming your truth in every tongue,
helping those in need, protecting the discriminated and scorned.
Renew your church in our time and place
So that it overflows with your love and hope.
Come, Holy Spirit, come, Breathe into our hearts this day.
Amen. (Ana Gobledale, UK, very loosely adapted)

OPENING HYMN
DOMINI

Let Every Christian Pray

Tune: LAUDES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-6whEKUNSE>

SCRIPTURE Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.
4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.
7Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

14But 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. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17‘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. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

MUSICAL PREPARATION
SON

Spirit of the Living God

Tune: IVER-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC9SQ4MdZVU>

MEDITATION Many Languages, One Gospel

The Rev. Marcia Lynn Cox

For as long as I have been a Christian and especially in the 25 years that I have been a pastor, I have meditated each year on the passage for Pentecost from the book of Acts.

The worship services that I have created have variously involved

asking people to wear red, the color of the day, representing the fire and flames that

“rested on the tongues of the disciples” and having the children sing Happy Birthday to the Church, because Pentecost is symbolically the day that believers gathered from many lands and cultures and were instructed to carry the gospel far and wide.

I’ve also asked members of my various congregations who knew a second language to read the scripture in that language.

The Holy Spirit is, has been, many things to many people. When we are “filled with the Holy Spirit” we are certainly given energy, set on fire, as it were. It is said to move us forward, enabling us to apply the teachings of Jesus and perceive God’s will in every

time and place. And we are so set on fire with the gospel message that we are compelled to share it with the word and hence, build the church.

Every time I read this passage from the Book of Acts, written, scholars think by the author of the gospel Luke, something new strikes me.

What has captured my attention this year in the “story” of Pentecost, is the importance of communication, in our church and in our world. It tells us that those gathered spoke many different languages, yet when the disciples, who were Galileans, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke, they heard the message in their own languages.

There are some members of a so called Christian denomination called Pentecostals who favor this passage and have a practice of “speaking in tongues.”

References to speaking in tongues by the Church fathers are rare, but it does seem to have its roots in early Christianity. As part of his attack on early Christianity, the second century Greek philosopher Celsus includes an account of Christian *glossolalia*, another word for this practice.

“Celsus describes prophecies made by several Christians in Palestine and Phoenicia of which he writes, ‘Having brandished these threats they then go on to add incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances, the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover: for they are meaningless and nonsensical, and give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes.’” (Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, Yale University Press, 1995)

In our world today such a practice is fortunately not common and I would ask what purpose it serves anyway. It seems to me what we need in our world is a greater degree of intelligible communication which can lead us to mutual understanding, which in turn can lead to peace, justice and mutual respect and compassion.

This week in particular, with the brutal murder in Minneapolis of an African man, George Floyd by a white police officer, we have seen an incomprehensible and blatant display of hatred and racism. Racism has existed for centuries, but this incident has caused us to acknowledge that we as a nation must simply put an end to it.

How might that be achieved? Hate groups need to be abolished by declaring them illegal. And certainly our laws must uphold the dignity and rights of all persons. But each and every one of us must hold these concepts deep within our hearts.

What is racism, really but an attitude held by one human being toward another that defines him or her as inferior, unworthy of respect or attention and as someone who can be used, abused and even killed for no reason other than the color of his or her skin. In the context of this morning's passage, it violates, stands in opposition to, the work of Holy Spirit which gave, and continues to give, everyone the ability to speak in his or her own language and to be understood and to receive the blessings and the teachings of the gospel.

This week we have also seen displays of rioting and looting as a reaction to the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. As Christians, in the spirit of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., we cannot support such destructive behavior. But, on a certain level, the anger and frustration that inspires such behavior is understandable.

In *The Other America*, a speech given at Stamford University in 1967, The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. emphasized his support for nonviolent tactics in the "struggle for freedom and justice" and expressed his disapproval for riots, referring to them as "socially destructive."

But he also said this:

"Certain conditions continue to exist in our society, which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention."

Rioting is the language of the unheard.

Is this not a wise observation that would indicate that communication might be a way to put an end to racism?

I recently came across post on Facebook, which was written by Deltha Katherine Harbin, a wife and mother of two. Since it was a public post and has been circulated widely, I feel comfortable sharing it with you here.

“My husband is 31 years old. [He] can proofread a paper to perfection!My husband was raised in an extremely wholesome home where they were not even allowed to watch Harry Potter. My husband has never tried any drugs.... He has never stolen from anyone, not even a corner store. My husband treats me and our sons like royalty. He serves at our local church faithfully and helps anyone he can. None of this stopped my husband from becoming a suspect in Semmes. My husband wanted to do me a favor one night when he got home late from work. He got my keys and drove around the corner to fill my tank at the gas station. While there, an older white woman was at a pump across from him and he noticed she appeared very nervous and stared at him. He said she got in her vehicle and got on her phone and pulled off to an area near the gas station. Within minutes police cars pulled in and surrounded him. He was questioned about why he was out.

He was questioned about his activity earlier in the day. He was told he fit a description. They asked who's car he was driving. He was told he could not leave. He was told the description was simply a black man. Not a 5 ft 7 inch black man of around 220 lbs who loves WWE, macaroni and cheese, and the Temptations. Just black. The older woman was now watching and the cops revealed she had called in his suspicious behavior of pumping gas. And now he was a suspect because he fit the description of being black. He was humiliated. He was emasculated. He was angry. He was helpless. He was on his way to being cuffed when a white man stepped in. An older white man told the officers they were wrong and that my husband had come from a different direction than the robbery they had mentioned. The officers released my husband after this. Not because my husband told them multiple times he was innocent. Not because there were two car seats in the back of my car. My husband's voice meant nothing. The only voice that penetrated those badges was a white one. My hard working, kind hearted, silly husband was guilty because of his skin and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. The sight of him caused a woman to call the police. He said he wanted to scream. He wanted to fight. He wanted yell at the top of his lungs that he was a man and he mattered. If he had, he would be deemed aggressive. He would be resisting so he said he kept telling himself he

had to make it home to me and the boys. He knew these men could kill him and justify it. He came home a changed man. I am a changed woman. We cried. We prayed and we have healed since this took place but it changed us. Issues that once felt somewhat distant became our reality. So, when you dismiss the plight of black men in America you diminish the ever present fear within our community.... If you think people make this up or are only apprehended by the police when they deserve it... you are part of the problem. Open your eyes but more importantly open your hearts to the reality of being black in America. We don't get the luxury of ignoring it because we live it. [A current photograph] of my precious family looks threatening to some people. My boys are cuddly and cute until they aren't anymore and then they become a threat too. My heart aches for our country and I feel so helpless. Lord, please heal the hearts and minds our land!"

It seems to me that only people who are drawn to only the most heartless and cruel human thoughts and tendencies would not be moved by a description of such an experience.

Some would say that people who hold racist attitudes cannot be changed. But as Christians, we believe in the power of conversion. So perhaps we can start by listening to one another. And engaging in conversation with people who are not only the victims of racism, but people hold racist beliefs. Perhaps we might uncover the origins of their hateful beliefs and behaviors and enable them to be transformed. And, although it might be painful, we too, must examine our hearts to see if we harbor any racist feelings ourselves.

So may the Holy Spirit to give us the courage to engage with one another honestly and on ever deeper levels. And may it move among us, in order for us to come to shared understandings of the common good, enabling all of God's beloved children to not only feel safe and respected but to flourish and grow. Our very lives and souls depend on it. Amen.

MUSICAL REFLECTION *Come Down, O Love Divine* Tune: DOWN AMPNEY
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgUFay0th9A>

PRAYER

God of wind, flame and peace, we offer our prayers this day in the spirit of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit descended to set the hearts and minds of all gathered on fire with the joy and power of the gospel. May it burn deep within our hearts and manifest itself in all that we think and say do.

Let us remember too, that although all of the people who were gathered spoke in different languages, they understood one another. So may we reflect this day on the Spirit's ability to enable us to create greater degrees of compassion and empathy as we both speak and listen in all of our encounters.

We pray that our interactions with neighbors close by and our neighbors around the globe might enable us to realize that we have so much in common as beloved children of God.

May we find that arrogance turns to humility, confusion to clarity, discord to harmony, cacophony to melody, agitation to peace, exploitation to justice.

May individualism be transformed to an understanding of the common good, nationalism into community.

And may strangers move into respectful and caring relationships

This week when our attention is turned to an overt display of violence and cruelty born of racism, we hold in our hearts the family of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, and all people of color especially who have been disrespected, harassed and killed simply because of the color of their skin. Enable us to help to put an end to feelings of hatred and displays of violence.

We pray for all people who are living without life's basic necessities and ask that our leaders will promote policies that bring about more employment opportunities and promote economic justice.

In the Spirit of understanding and empathy, we are mindful, healing God, of all who are suffering from diseases of the body, the mind and the spirit, especially.....

For those who are preparing for medical procedures....

For those who care for the sick and the dying....

For those people facing death

For all who have passed into care and for family and friends who mourn their loss.....

In our own lives, we bring to you now our joys and concerns....

All these things we offer, using the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

OFFERING

Although we are not gathering in the sanctuary for worship on Sundays for the time being, the church continues to have expenses. So it would be most appreciated if pledges and offerings could be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 307, New Hartford, CT 06057. Thank you for your generosity.

CLOSING HYMN

Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness

Tune: SPIRIT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTbQiUVdVMQ>

OUR COMMON COMMISSION

Let us now forth into the world in peace.
Being of good courage.
Holding fast to that which is good.
Rendering to no one evil for evil.
Strengthening the fainthearted.
Supporting the weak.
Helping the afflicted.
Honoring all persons.
Loving and serving the Lord,
And rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

MUSICAL BENEDICTION *Spirit Song (O Let the Son of God Enfold You)*

John Wimber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlmF3xc2vKM>