

A New Season, The Same Spirit
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church
May 31, 2020- Livestream Service
Acts 2:1-21A
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They were all together in one place. Isn't that one of the most ironic things we could hear from the Bible today. "They were all together in one place," oh if only that could be so!

It's Pentecost. And besides the few of us leading and recording this service today, nobody is together in this place. Nobody. And it's strange. And it's jarring. And you feel it in your bones-that this is not the way it's supposed to be.

But maybe-despite just how jarring and off it feels to not be together in this place-maybe this story and our situation are just right for hearing the message of Pentecost. Maybe this sense of things not being the way they're supposed to be, things not being the way they used to be-puts us in a similar mindset to Jesus followers gathered that day who had also stepped into a brand new season. One they hadn't asked for. One they didn't know if they could manage.

By now, the disciples and other close followers of Jesus realized that Jesus was not coming back to them. Some of them had seen Him disappear into the heavens. He'd made clear that the mantle of His mission was now laid on them-even as He promised to be with them in a different way. I'm guessing this new season brought a whole lot of anxiety for them: feelings of inadequacy, abandonment, and wondering how to carry on without their master and teacher. Remember, Jesus' disciples were not credentialed people. They were not rabbis or scholars. They were ordinary folks. Fisherman. Tax collector. Everyday people who, like you and me, slid back and forth along the spectrum of faith and doubt, commitment and apathy, courage and fear.

Some of you know I'm from a big family, 2 sisters, 5 brothers. My dad, when he was living, operated a small excavating business. Three of my brothers have had involvement in that business. 2 of them own and operate it now. My oldest brother started down the excavating path and then stepped off it to become a CRC minister instead. Recently, my youngest brother, one of the owners told me that when my oldest brother took his leave of the business-it was the most terrifying experience of his life. You see, my dad had had an incapacitating stroke at the age of 58 while my youngest brother was still in high school. My oldest brother took over running the business for a while until the call to seminary pressed hard enough for him to leave the two remaining interested brothers on their own. "How could he leave me with so much to learn and so little experience," thought my youngest brother. "How will I ever be able to carry the mantle put on me, he wondered" feeling profoundly his lack of experience and knowledge and credentials. He hadn't asked for this new season. And he didn't want it.

You know, the church, we didn't ask for this new season we're in. We really don't want to have to navigate this time of balancing risk and benefit when it comes to all kinds of decisions like grocery shopping or seeing my grandchildren or returning to worship, or serving our community. It's hard to know how to be the church right now, in the midst of a pandemic, with political division and racial tension flaring all around us. And putting all of our knowledge and wisdom together-still doesn't feel like enough somehow! We're not credentialed for this. We haven't walked this particular road before.

But we have this story this morning. And in it-there is so much hope for us. There is so much good news to be taken from what happened on the day of Pentecost. Because as much the world is always turning, our lives and circumstances always changing, as much as the church is

almost always facing a new season; there are a couple things that have not and will not change. And these two things provide us with a way forward-no matter what new season we're in. Whether it's a good new season-like a graduation or new career, or a season we didn't ask for. What stays the same, no matter the season, and what will provide for us direction, courage, inspiration, and much more; are the mission and the Spirit of God.

First the mission. Pentecost is sometimes called the church's birthday because on that day, and by the powerful breath of the Holy Spirit, folks, mostly Jews, who had been dispersed to many places and spoke many languages, could hear and understand the gospel message being spoken in their language! And the global church was born. People from over 15 lands and languages-sharing one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one Lord and Savior. Today marks the birthday of the church. But Pentecost is more than that because the church was never meant to be the church for the church's sake only. In other words-the church was born for the sake of something bigger than herself.

The Bible scholar, Eugene Peterson, believes that the story of Pentecost, the birth of the church in Acts 1 and 2, intentionally parallels the story of Jesus' birth in Luke 1 and 2. Luke, who authored both Luke and Acts, intentionally parallel's the Holy Spirit's conception of Jesus, with the Holy's Spirit conception of the church and he does it to show that the joy and good news for the world that Jesus' brought is what the church brings as well.

Joy and good news is our mission. In every new season we can be certain it stays the same. It's a mission of freedom for captives. Justice for the oppressed. Food for the hungry. It's a mission that reaches out to all people and breaks down barriers that keep us apart. It's a mission already made clear to Abraham and Sarah-that God's blessing came to them for the sake of blessing all people. In every new season, it's comforting to know that our mission remains the same.

Secondly, this is also true-the same eternal Spirit who lead Abraham and Sarah, who inspired the prophets and gave birth to the church, still breathes on us. I love how Simeon in Luke 2 was moved by the Spirit, and could feel it in his bones that this child he held in his arms was born to be a light for all people. Simeon quotes Isaiah, who was moved by the Spirit to point to the coming of the Servant of the Lord, who'd bring light for revelation to the Gentiles and release from those who sit in darkness.

What I'm saying is that as God's story unfolds the very same Spirit, enabling the very same mission, is at work in us. We need not fear. LaGrave church and the Presbyterian church down the street and the Baptist church in the next county and Christians gathered outdoors in Tanzania-we've all been given the same Spirit-the Spirit who filled Isaiah and Mary and Simeon and Peter and the early church. That Spirit will remain with us until the mission of God is complete. In the meantime, that same Spirit will lead us to dream dreams, to feel things in our bones-and our daughters and sons will prophesy. We need not be afraid!

I think we can all give testimony to that Spirit. But let me tell you how I've seen the Spirit's breath of life at work among us recently. When one of our members was terribly sick during this time of Covid-another member, an elder, feeling the need to help in her bones, found herself delivering a prayer shawl to a front door. With timing that was certainly Spirit-prompted, likely unbeknownst to her, she had carried a message that breathed life and hope to the care giver and the very sick member. Because the Spirit that came at Pentecost is the same Spirit breathing life into us.

I've had some conversations with a few of you recently about how we're feeling the racial tensions and racial inequalities of our nation deep in our bones right now. And we need to

pay attention to that. For when the church is prompted to seek justice for the oppressed, the Spirit of Pentecost is at work. When the church leans into understanding racial inequality and breaking down barriers, the Spirit of Pentecost is at work. When the church serves a warm meal in the heart of the city, when it hops in a van and drives to the prison in Ionia (if permitted), when it tutors immigrant students, and cares for the feet of the homeless-you can be sure the Spirit of Pentecost is at work.

Friends we are all in this new season together. And if what you are feeling in your bones is moving you toward cross-shaped justice and mercy, and sharing joy and good news with this world God loves so much-then the same Spirit who came at Pentecost is breathing life into you too. Do not be afraid! Amen.

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