

**One Spirit, Many Gifts**  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
June 12, 2011

**Acts 2:1-21 (2:17)**

<sup>1</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.’

**1 Corinthians 12:3b-13 (12:7, 11)**

no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various

kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

<sup>12</sup>For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

### **John 20:19-23 (20:22)**

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

In light of the recent natural disasters in our country, I cannot help but think of tornadoes when I hear this morning’s reading from Acts. “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.” With the advances in meteorology, most people knew the tornadoes were coming and yet, that expectation, I am certain, did nothing to lessen the terror they felt at the mercy of such extreme winds, at the mercy of a wind which could hurl cars, strip 100-year-old trees, and move homes off of foundations and crumble buildings. Once those winds came through, nothing would ever be the same for those who experienced the tornadoes. Imagine. A friend of mine, as a six-year-old boy, was riding his bicycle around when he heard tornado sirens. As a six-year-old would do, his focus was on getting home. When he realized he could not outrun or, really, out-pedal the storm, he got off his bike and threw himself into a ditch, face down. Where I have a healthy respect and awe for the power behind such a storm, only heightened by a Severe and Unusual Weather class in college, he carries a level of fear along with his awe and respect.

Imagine now, if you will, being the disciples gathered together. They knew to expect the Holy Spirit; we heard last week how Jesus had told them to stay put until the Spirit came. He told them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” And then, seemingly out of nowhere, came the sound of a violent wind, perhaps very much like that freight train, like that roar we hear of from tornado survivors. Except it was only the sound; nothing stirred, not a shutter was slammed shut, not a hair was moved. They could not have imagined that the Spirit would come like this. Perhaps they imagined a dove, like they knew of from Jesus’ baptism. Or perhaps, they remembered the way in which Elijah encountered God in the still, small voice. Something calm and gentle, maybe. But what came was powerful, terrifying, far from small, and somehow exciting in the face of it.

And the tongues of fire! Imagine being one of the twelve. You look across the room to each of your friends and they all are crowned in flames, seemingly unaware. You can clearly see these flames, which

dance upon their heads without harming them. Suddenly you realize, if they each are marked by tongues of flame, maybe you are, too. You open your mouth to ask the friend nearest to you and out comes a language you do not know nor understand. Maybe you recognize it from the marketplace and the temple, where Jews have come from every corner of the world to celebrate the feast of Weeks, but you know it is no language you, a simple peasant, have ever learned in rural Galilee. And you realize, once the sound of that wind came through, nothing was ever going to be the same for those who experienced it. These disciples, the followers, became apostles, those who are sent, and their lives would never be the same.

Theologically speaking, this moment is the birth of the church and what an apt description it is. Terror is mingled with excitement which makes way for joy. On this birthday, but not only, we remember that we have been given gifts from the Spirit. Of course, these aren't ordinary gifts which can be tucked into a closet or stored under the bed. They are meant to be *used* and *regularly*. We read that the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. So the gifts you have been given are uniquely yours. If you possess the gift of hospitality, I guarantee that you go about sharing that gift in a different way than the person sitting three pews away, who also has a gift of hospitality. Some gifts we've had since we were young, some might even say since we were born. Other gifts, though, are discovered throughout our lives. There are some gifts which we have and recognize now, that we wouldn't have known how to use 10, 15, 30 years ago. And we not only uncover them at the right times for each of us, but in the right ways for each of us.

God, through the Holy Spirit, gave the disciples the ability to speak in many languages, unknown to them, so that those present, those Jews who were similar in many ways yet different because of the lands from which they came, so that those present might receive the good news in a way that they each could understand. Just as God did then, God now speaks to each of us in ways which we can understand. For some of us, we comprehend God through beauty, which we receive in so many forms. Beauty in nature. Beauty in art. Beauty in words. Beauty in music. Beauty in drama. For some, we understand God through actions, both our own and those actions of others. For some, God is understood in the silence. For some, God is understood through the repetition needed to get it through our thick skulls.

All God's efforts to communicate with us originate in the same place that caused God to send God's only Son. God came down to our level, literally and figuratively, so we might understand that God loves us, *US*, that God is love, that God would do anything for us, even to the point of taking on what humans feared most - death. And because of God's persistence, and patience, we get it; and we understand that death is to be feared no longer because of the way in which God got through to us, through Christ's death and resurrection. Through God's persistence and patience we also receive the

gifts of the Spirit, each in our own way, and all out of God's love, not only for us as individuals but for us as God's created world.

Our reading in 1 Corinthians says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Now, I have a confession to make. I am a word nerd. I am fascinated by etymology, of words, of phrases, of clichés, you name it. For goodness' sake, I own a *Complete Rhyming Dictionary*! So when I came across the word "manifestation," my Spidey-senses began to tingle. This word is uncommon in the Bible and unusual to boot so I wanted to know more. Fortunately, my seminary education required me to learn both biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek, which are the primary original languages in which the oral stories of the Bible were written down. So, I took a look at the Greek and, as I imagined, there are a number of ways in which the sentence can be translated.

What follows is my belief as the best one: "But also to each is given the disclosure of the Spirit for the purpose of being advantageous." *Panerosis* really has two possible ways to come into English, neither of which is "manifestation"; instead, it can mean either announcement or disclosure. Seeing as I've already mentioned four ways in which the Spirit has been manifested in the biblical witness, it doesn't make sense to say "each is given *the* manifestation of the Spirit." *The* disclosure fits what we read. Where I was surprised by the Greek was in the reading of the end of the sentence. *Sumpheron* isn't really "common good" but, instead, can be one of a few participles. Stay with me on this one. Checking it against our context, "bringing together" and "conferring a benefit" both *could* have worked but being advantageous seems best. The Spirit of God seems best given so as to be advantageous.

To each, to each of *us*, is given the disclosure, the *revelation*, of the Spirit for the purpose of being advantageous, for the purpose of the whole. The one Spirit is revealed in many and distinct gifts, given to the many members of the one body, for the good of the whole body. And sometimes the Spirit is revealed in overwhelming, awe-inspiring, maybe even fearful ways. And sometimes we find the gifts have been with us without us even realizing it. However it is we come to receive the gifts, it is God who activates them in everyone. God causes them to begin to function in each of us and then, just as Jesus did with the disciples, God sends us out to make use of these gifts. Remember, not for the closet or under the bed?

What does it mean that we are sent out? My husband knows that if he is home when the mail comes and I am not that, invariably, I will ask him when I return if we got any mail. I'm not talking about just any mail. The envelope full of carpet-cleaning coupons doesn't count. The mortgage bill doesn't count. The postcard from the local realty company doesn't count. I'm talking about *good* mail. The kind that might come as a surprise. The hand-written letter or the travel postcard or the package. Good mail. The kind you want to open. The kind you are excited to receive. The kind you are glad someone

bothered to send. *We* are to be the good mail. God has taken great care to activate our gifts in us. We are handmade by God and touched by the Spirit with special attributes that make us each unique and beautiful, true gifts from God. God lovingly prepares us for the journey, wrapping us in God's love. And then God sends us out. And anyone who receives us as being sent by God will receive God's love through us, will see us as good mail, and will receive us with gladness. To whom are you being sent? Or perhaps where? Has God sent you to a family member? Or to a stranger? Or maybe to a new place? This week, remember that you are good mail, meant to be shared, whose gifts are advantageous for the whole body of Christ, for all God's children. So let yourself be sent out.

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit, come, in a whisper or a roar, and reveal yourself to us through your gifts. God, help us to know what to do with our gifts once you have activated them. Here we are, Lord, send us. Amen.