

Cheney United Methodist Church

May 31, 2020 – Pentecost Sunday with the GNW Episcopal Area

Call to Worship

The Day of Pentecost is here:

the day when our babbling speech becomes the Good News for the world.

The Day of Pentecost is here:

the day when compassion is seared into our souls.

The Day of Pentecost is here:

the day when the Spirit transforms the Christian community.

It is the day when locked doors are opened;

where fear is replaced by courage and peace is proclaimed.

It is the day when those who were once afraid now speak up boldly

so that thousands hear the Good News in their own language.

It is the day we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit -

a gift we are given to share with all the world! Amen!

Opening Hymn – (tune of “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”)

1. *Holy Spirit, Wind of Heaven, breath of Life, our warmth and light,
Power of creation, bringing hopeful dawn from darkest night:
you have birthed us, you have borne us, you have blessed us all our days.
Now you fill our lungs with singing; how you fill our hearts with praise.*

2. *Holy Spirit, flame of passion, you who brought the Church to be,
re-create us as your Body, holy in our unity.*

*Fill us with your fierce compassion, gentle courage, trust and peace;
lead us all to love each other, make our sad divisions cease.*

3. *Holy Spirit, Dove descending, mind of Christ within us all;
speak your wisdom, move among us, help us hear your inner call.*

*Be the pow’r that moves us; be our life, O Singing Dove!
Holy Spirit, come! Revive us! Fill us with your heart of love!*

Opening Prayer

Holy One, for all the ways you speak to us – in rushing wind, in dancing flames, in words we understand, and in all that transcends language, we give thanks. We give you thanks for all the ways that you bless our lives: the beauty and abundance of nature, the love of family and friends, the joy of knowing you and hearing your word. Send Your Spirit during this time of worship so that we might dream your dreams and see visions of the world as you created it to be. Guide our thoughts and actions. Give us courage to share your love even in the midst of change and uncertainty. Bring us closer to you so that we might do your will and dwell in your house forever. Amen.

New Testament Reading – Acts 2:1-21 (MSG)

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force - no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own

mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues? Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Even Cretans and Arabs! They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?" Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine."

That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk - it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

*"In the Last Days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes, I'll pour out my Spirit on those who serve me,
men and women both, and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire
and billowing smoke, the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
before the Day of the Lord arrives, the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help to me, God, will be saved."*

The Word of Life.

Thanks be to God.

Virtual Chancel Choir Anthem- "Ancient Words" by Purifoy

1. *Holy words long preserved for our walk in this world,
they resound with God's own heart. Oh, let the ancient words impart.*
2. *Words of life, words of hope give us strength, help us cope.
In this world, wher-e'er we roam, ancient words will guide us home.
Refrain: Ancient words, ever true, changing me and changing you.
We have come with open hearts, oh, let the ancient words impart.*
3. *Holy words of our faith handed down to this age, came to us through sacrifice.
Oh, heed the faithful words of Christ. Refrain.
In this world wher-e'er we roam, ancient words will guide us home.
We have come with open hearts, oh, let the ancient words impart.*

The Word Interpreted

"Now You're Speaking My Language!"

Pastor Alissa

You might be wondering why our Virtual Chancel Choir sang *Ancient Words* for the anthem today. No one can deny it's a beautiful song with a great message for any Sunday...but Pentecost Sunday - was it really the best choice? I mean it's not exactly a Pentecost-y kind of song; there's no flames or fire, no wind and tongues, no HOLY SPIRIT! How can you leave the Spirit out on Pentecost?!

Well I will admit it's an *unconventional* choice for this particular Sunday in the life of the church, but I do think it might actually be a better fit than you think. Consider this: our Scripture reading from Acts 2 today which takes place in the 1st century C.E. includes a scripture from the prophet Joel whose writings date back as far as the 8th century *B.C.E.* Which means that on that first Pentecost when Peter quoted the prophet in defense of observers claiming that the only rational explanation for what was taking place was drunkenness...he was using *ancient words* to explain what was taking place. Ancient words that had been preserved for many generations, handed down through sacrifice to him and his

contemporaries, who had the open hearts necessary to receive the hope and strength they would need to share God's own heart wher-e'er they roamed as they heeded the faithful words of Christ.

And those roamings in the name of Christ were written down and preserved through sacrifice, handed down generations all the way to us, who with our open hearts, receive the same hope and strength that *we* need to share God's heart wher-e'er we're called to roam as we heed the faithful words of Christ. Whether you're considering it in the contexts of the first Pentecost or our celebration today, one of the lessons is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures of our faith can speak to every generation and provide inspiration no matter their situation. So...*Ancient Words* might actually be a perfect Pentecost song after all! Especially when you consider that it was words in ancient and *foreign* languages that was at the core of the whole experience and which made it possible for the Good News of Jesus Christ to be spread to all the known world at the time.

It wasn't unusual in the 1st Century for everyday folk, including the disciples from the remote towns of the Galilee, to speak a smattering of other languages. While their native language would likely have been Aramaic, they could probably get around conversationally in Greek and Hebrew with perhaps some snippets of other regional languages. But fluency? The ability to convey theological concepts and tell rich complex stories like the feeding of the 5000, the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage or say, the resurrection...that might have been a stretch! You have to be fairly proficient in a foreign language to possess the nuance, colloquialisms and syntax to communicate effectively at that level! Hence the disbelief of those gathered that day when fisherman and day laborers could suddenly articulate the Gospel message in languages they previously did not know! And yet...with the power of the Holy Spirit they were able to do that and more!

Following that first Pentecost, the disciples went forth to share the Good News with people all across the known world – using their Spirit-given tool kit to connect with the people they met and to open their hearts to what Jesus taught about God. We know from the rest of the Book of Acts that the first generation of Pentecost-commissioned disciples traveled far and wide in the Eastern Mediterranean using their new-fangled language skills to share the Gospel with whomever they met whether it was a highly educated Ethiopian eunuch, a Jewish lawyer named Saul who spent his days persecuting Christians, or a Roman centurion of the likes that crucified Jesus. And when they commissioned the second generation of apostles, they, too, embraced the gift of language learning to reach new followers for Christ. Paul, a native Hebrew speaker, clearly with the help of the Holy Spirit and his dedication to his ministry for Christ, was eventually so fluent in Greek that he confidently preached to the Athenians *in Greek, in the Areopagus*, the center of administration and public discourse in town. His example and the example of so many who followed him is one in which the lesson of Pentecost is observed: knowledge of another language is key to partnering with the Holy Spirit in bringing forth the kingdom of God. She will bring the inspiration, courage, and vision; you just have to be willing to learn to speak to new people in a new way.

If you've ever undertaken to learn a new language, then you know that it's not like learning your native language. Linguists teach that learning a foreign language uses a different part of our brain than the development of our native tongue which is why we have to use so much practice, repetition and commitment to make progress. When we're learning our native language as young children, we simply develop it through exposure – rather than memorizing the rules of conjugation and teaching our ear to "hear" when we are saying something wrong. For those of us born and raised in the US, learning a foreign language likely wasn't something particularly prioritized in our upbringing. Sure, in most school districts, there's still a requirement that we all take two years of the language of our choice in high school. Though the choices are usually limited to Spanish, French, and maybe German or Japanese. But because most of us start learning a foreign language later in life, when it's much harder to learn than when we were children, the experience can be overwhelming, awkward, and even discouraging. And when it's just to satisfy a graduation requirement, where you don't have a real *reason* for learning it,

then it's hard to put the time and energy into making it a priority. Everyone speaks English in our country, right? Why should *I* have to learn someone else's language in *my* country?

When I was 10 years old, I got a lesson in why this isn't a great mindset to have. My family was preparing to move to Germany for three years and my mom was doing some last-minute shopping with my grandmother from Arizona. Another family was likewise shopping and speaking their native language which was not English apparently. My grandmother, who was the first generation of her family to be raised speaking English exclusively rather than her family's native Norwegian, disapproved of this and commented aloud sharing a sentiment I've heard before: "this is America – they should speak English if they want to live here". Though I wasn't there, I've always harbored some pride for my mother who boldly responded with "We're moving to Germany *tomorrow*. I will not be speaking German to my children." Good comeback, Mom!

In the three years we lived there, our family, not surprisingly, spoke English with each other, but we did learn quite a bit of German. And I learned French because in Europe, where there are a lot more countries with their own languages in close proximity, they do prioritize learning multiple foreign languages and learning them EARLY! My Norwegian cousin, Stine Beate, was required to start English in Kindergarten, German in 5th grade and had the option to take more languages in high school! She's very fluent in English and I'm sure her German is way better than mine and she's never lived there! When I visited Norway a few years ago, I had the opposite experience from what my grandmother believed was proper: all my cousins spoke English to me – and were very happy to speak *my* language in *their* country so I would I feel comfortable when we spent time together, understand what was being discussed, and experience the joy of being included in our Norwegian family.

Now consider if we applied *this* approach to our *church* family rather than my grandmother's. I hope I speak for everyone when I say that we want new people to feel comfortable when we all worship together, to understand what is being discussed and to experience the joy of being a part of the body of Christ so that they, too, might be compelled through the Spirit's work and our witness to become a follower of Christ. So, if that's the case, it begs the question: what languages do *we* need to learn for *our* mission field?

If you noticed, the languages that the disciples were gifted to speak on Pentecost, were all the ones they would need as they went forth into *their* mission fields: Parthian, Medean and Elamite for the mission field of what is now Iran, various dialects of Greek for everywhere from Cappadocia to Crete, plus Phrygian for Asia Minor, Egyptian for (well) Egypt and even Arabic for the Arabian peninsula. Not to mention that they would also use the languages they already knew to reach people in Judea, Rome, and their own backyard! It's not hard to imagine why the early church had so much success in reaching people to the ends of the earth when they went about it by speaking the native languages of the people they met in their countries, rather than asking the newcomer to Christ to learn the language of the newcomer to their country!

Perhaps before we ask what language we need to learn, before we celebrate our modern Pentecost moment, we need to know our mission field so we can know what languages the Spirit would inspire us to learn. So, consider with me, who are you called to share the Good News with in your part of "to the ends of the earth"? Who are your neighbors? Who is new to the community you live in? Where are they from? What are their ages, interests, cultural practices? How do they prefer to communicate, participate, or collaborate? What is important to them? What message of love, justice, and peace is God asking you to share with them and what is the best way to share it?

The answers to these questions might lead you to identifying that learning a new language. Even if it's only the basics of "Hi! My name is _____. Please and thank you!" (which, I can attest, as someone who has learned those phrases in numerous languages) can go a LONG way in showing you are invested in developing a relationship with someone new. Combined with hand gestures, a big smile and maybe a dictionary, you'd be surprised how much you can communicate despite a language barrier!

But imagine the impact you could have if you, as a lay or clergy person, could speak enough of the language of someone new to your church that you could convey God's heart to them through conversation, teaching and even preaching!

But while I have dedicated most of this sermon to spoken language, the reality is that in our modern context, there's a lot of ways we can learn to communicate with others in new "languages" that weren't available or even necessary to the original disciples. If your mission field includes younger folks, you might consider learning the language of Snapchat or other online social media platforms (while learning the language of appropriate boundaries for the online world). If your mission field includes someone who is hearing impaired, the Spirit might encourage you to learn American Sign Language or the technicalities of a hearing assist system. I know that many of us, in response to the physical distancing directives needed to slow the spread of COVID-19, have been learning the language of YouTube, streaming video, and Zoom in order to make worship, Bible Study, and ministry available to our churches but the added bonus, is that these platforms make it possible to literally reach the ends of the earth! Now that's a global approach to evangelism!

But we don't have to stop there, we can also dedicate ourselves to learning the languages of justice and peace – listening to and learning from those most impacted by the societal issues and systems of oppression that plague our community, our country, and our world. If you live in a predominantly white community, you might consider learning about the African American experience in America and why partnering with the "Black Lives Matter" movement is part of our Kingdom-building work. If you have LGBTQIA folx in your neighborhood or family, learning how to speak with inclusive language and using pronouns in a way you're not used to can go a long way to making someone who has been historically excluded by the church feel welcome in the Body of Christ. What would the world be like if we all dedicated ourselves to learning to speak the language of fair-trade, sustainable development, unregulated compassion, and empowerment of women of color? Well, it might just be inching closer to the world as God envisioned it and as the Spirit would have it! I can almost hear God saying "now you're speaking my language!"

I imagine what I've just said has made some of you feeling a little uncomfortable and while that wasn't my primary intention, it's the unavoidable impact of stretching ourselves to learn something that isn't native to us. Whether it's a language, a belief, a worldview, or societal stance, we've all been raised with a set given to us our families of origin. Like the disciples who woke up on that Pentecost morning speaking their birth language, equipped only with the skills needed to conduct the family trade, and figuring out what to do now that Jesus has ascended, we woke up today with our native language filling our heads, possessing the skills we've honed through education, work, or practice, and (hopefully) staying home and staying safe as much as possible. Yet, like the disciples, on this Pentecost Sunday, the Spirit has plans for us even in the midst of this pandemic!

For sure, COVID-19 is changing the way we do church, but it turns out, change is the Holy Spirit's specialty and adapting with her encouragement is part of our ancient Christian heritage! So how will you celebrate the birthday of the church this year? What new language will you commit yourself to speaking in the face of naysayers with the same "bold urgency" of Peter and the other eleven? To whom will you carry the Good News of Jesus Christ in a language of their own even if it's not of your own? And how will you let the Spirit inspire you and equip you for this new chapter in the life of the church?

If you're not sure where to start, then I encourage you to go back to where we started today: revisit the ancient words of the book of Acts. Learn from the first disciples how to do church in a brand-new way (keeping in mind, they had no prior way!) Follow their example as they overcame the obstacles of language, culture, and their personal fears to share the love of God with people throughout the world. Turn to others who are speak with fluency the languages you need to learn and ask them to teach you. Read books. Sign up for DuoLingo or a webinar on white fragility (if you don't know what those are, find out!) Let the Spirit guide you and inspire you to learn something new to reach someone different

for the sake of the Gospel. Shake off your fears and embrace the spirit of Pentecost as we commit ourselves once again to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world! Hallelujah! Amen!

Hymn of Reflection

150 Spirit, Working in Creation

1. Spir-it, work-ing in cre - a - tion, bring-ing or - der
 2. Spir-it, o - ver - shad - owing Ma - ry as the Christ-child
 3. Spir-it, driv-ing to the des - ert ev - en God's A -
 4. Spir-it, wind and flame, em - pow-ering fear - less wit - ness

out of strife: Come a - round God's gath - ered peo - ple,
 in her grew: Come, so that the Christ with - in us
 noint - ed One: Come to us in trial and test - ing
 to the lost: Come, u - nite, re - new your won - ders

giv-ing har-mo - ny and life. Spir - it, speak - ing through your
 may to - day be born a - new. Spir - it, com - ing from the
 that God's will in us be done. Spir - it, breathed on the dis -
 as of a new Pen - te - cost! Praise and glo - ry, Ho - ly

proph-ets so the voice of God was heard: Come, in - spire, a -
 heav - ens as a dove up - on our Lord: Come up - on your
 ci - ples, giv-ing peace where there was fear: Come a - mong us,
 Spir - it, for your love on us out - poured, giv - ing hon - or

lert your peo - ple to this day's pro - phe - tic word.
 gath - ered peo - ple, and your bless - ings be out - poured.
 touch us, send us, mak - ing Je - sus' pres - ence near.
 to the Fa - ther and pro - claim - ing Je - sus, "Lord."

Offering & Prayer of Dedication

Though we aren't able to gather, we continue to be called to support the ministries of the church through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Please take a moment to consider what you have to offer to God this week through the traditional offering and make a commitment to follow through with that offering. You may mail your offering to the church or drop it in our mailbox: 204 4th St. Cheney, WA 99004. If you so wish, you may recite or sing the Doxology then pray the prayer of dedication:

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise God all creatures here below: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Holy God, thank you for sending your Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Christ, from heaven. Fill our hearts and minds with your gifts of faith, hope, and love. May our conversations with people of every language and culture around us witness to your grace and mercy. We dedicate ourselves and our offerings to your good purposes in the world through our church's mission by the power of your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer

God of wind and flame, blow into our lives. Ignite the fire of hope, fan the flames of possibility. Transform us into a people who share your love with a world in pain, a people who proclaim your hope into a world given to despair, a people who live as though the world can be changed into the kingdom that is to come.

Baptizing God, who calls us to be a baptizing community, you speak to us in many languages over the course of our lives: the burbles and laughs and wails of infancy, the indistinct speech and partial words of toddlerhood, the strange syntax and slang of late childhood and adolescence, the full language of adulthood, the quavering speech and muted tones of old age. Speak to us in the language that we need to hear today, hear us in the language that we speak.

God of many languages, You sing the language of joy with us, you join us in the dance of life. Hear all of your children who sing and dance and praise this morning, those who celebrate new life with all the possibilities of the future, those who celebrate relationships, both the new and exciting and the long-term yet still exciting, those for whom the wonder of life fills their being to the limit, may they hear your voice joining in the singing and the shouting!

And yet, God of life, you also speak the languages of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of despair. Hear all your children who speak, who wail, who whisper in these languages this day: those who find themselves in hospital beds, or waiting anxiously to hear results, those who gather to say farewell to one who is traveling, or one who is moving, those who gather at graveside to say that longer farewell, those who worry about where the next meal, or the next rent cheque, will come from, those who live in places where peace is just a word, a faint hope, a distant dream, may all those whose language is rent by pain hear you lamenting with them.

God of Pentecost, God who speaks with many tongues, God who makes God-self known in many ways, fill us with Your Spirit this and every morning, hear the prayers we share using many different languages, we pray in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the one we call Christ, whose life, death and resurrection show us the path to the Kingdom. The one who taught us to pray, saying:

**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 our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn

2120 Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness

Refrain



Spir - it, Spir - it of gen - tle-ness, blow through the



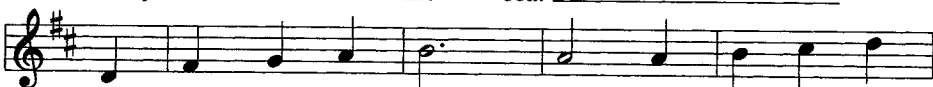
wil - der-ness call - ing and free; _____ Spir -



it, Spir - it of rest - less-ness, stir me from plac - id-ness,



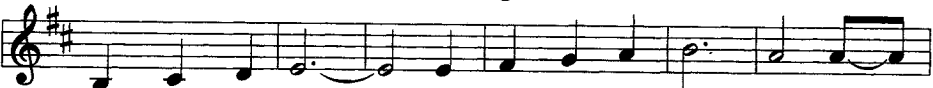
Wind, Wind on the sea. _____



1. You moved on the wa - ters, you called to the
2. You swept through the des - ert, you stung with the
3. You sang in a sta - ble, you cried from a
4. You call from to - mor - row, you break an - cient



deep, _____ then you coaxed up the moun - tains from the
sand, _____ and you goad - ed your peo - ple with a
hill, _____ then you whis-pered in si - lence when the
schemes, _____ from the bon - dage of sor - row the



val - leys of sleep; _____ and o - ver the e - ons you
law and a land; _____ and when they were blind - ed with their
whole world was still; _____ and down in the cit - y you
cap - tives dream dreams, _____ our wom - en see vi - sions, our



called to each thing: _____ wake from your slum -
i - dols and lies, _____ then you spoke through your proph -
called once a - gain, _____ when you blew through your peo -
men clear their eyes, _____ with bold new de - ci -

D.C.



bers _____ and rise on your wings. _____
ets _____ to o - pen their eyes. _____
ple _____ on the rush of the wind. _____
sions _____ your peo - ple a - rise. _____

Benediction

Go out into the world, and labor to bring forth new life.

Dream dreams, pursue visions
and learn new languages to speak of God's goodness
in the words of those who would hear.

And may the God who breathed life into creation be your delight.

May Christ Jesus give hope to your dreaming,
and may the Holy Spirit, your advocate and supporter,
set your hearts ablaze with a passion for peace!