

## Pentecost A 2026 Acts 2:1-21

Last Sunday when I wasn't with you I was hiking in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. The Park Service has a new app for your phone that uses satellite maps for navigation, which I found really useful, since some of the trail signs look like they might be original to the park, which is 90 years old. When multiple trails crossed at one of those hard-to-read signs, it helped to walk a few yards while looking at the digital map to see that the blue dot that marked my location was moving in the right direction. It reminded me of the old cartoons where a little red dot and a little blue dot showed Wile E. Coyote chasing the Roadrunner, though fortunately we didn't fall off of any cliffs. The trails and even the side roads off of Skyline Drive are windy enough that you need a good map to stay oriented in the right direction. One morning, having not checked the map, we looked at the position of the sun and realized we were on the opposite side of the ridge from where we thought we were going. That can happen in the life of faith, too; one lesson of Pentecost is to pay attention to the direction that the Spirit calls us to go.

Before it was a Christian holiday, Pentecost was a Jewish festival observed, as the name says, 50 days after Passover, where the people gave an offering from the first fruits of the wheat harvest and celebrated God giving the Torah, the Law, to Moses on Mount Sinai. Pilgrims from all over the world had gathered for the occasion in Jerusalem where the disciples were still together waiting, as per Jesus' instructions, for the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit did arrive, like a storm blowing the doors off of the place. Along with the physical sign of a tongue of fire resting on each of the disciples, they received the power to speak in figurative tongues, that is, in the native languages, of all of those pilgrims from, as Luke puts it, every people under heaven. These Galilean apostles, whom we have no reason to think had ever experienced any kind of international travel or foreign language education, could suddenly tell the story of Jesus in other languages, heard and understood by everyone in the crowd.

Among those who were amazed and perplexed there were still some skeptics. But Peter, who was clearly at the very beginning of his preaching career, assures the people that the apostles are not drunk, providing them with the very logical proof that it is only nine in the morning. He then turns to scripture to liken this multicultural event to the promises God made through Joel's prophecy that the Spirit would be poured out *on all flesh*. So the disciples' new linguistic ability is not for fun and not for show but the way in which the Spirit is going to come to dwell in all the nations of the earth. Now that these pilgrims have heard about the deeds of power that God accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, they can take

that message back to the home communities from which they traveled. Imagine a satellite map of the whole known world with little blue dots slowly moving away from Jerusalem, carrying the story of Jesus, expanding the church as far as there were people.

That is what I mean when I say that Pentecost is a lesson about the direction in which we are called and empowered to go. So often the church has behaved as if the Spirit should be moving people inward, bringing them in here to us. But from the very beginning, the Spirit was working in the opposite direction—sending the message out. The Spirit didn't give the Judeans, Cappadocians, Medes, and Egyptians the ability to hear and understand the apostles' mother tongue—Aramaic spoken with a Galilean accent, but the opposite. The Spirit gave the apostles the ability to reach outward. That's the gift of the Spirit that we celebrate today.

What we do here, what the Spirit does in us and for us and with us and through us here, is vital, life giving work. But it is never intended to stay in here for only our own mutual benefit. In Lent, we gathered here on Wednesdays to worship together and to eat together, and that was fulfilling and filling for us. But then we prayed not just for our church but for the church throughout the world, for the whole creation that makes up the world, for leaders throughout the world, for people in all places and spaces who need help. Those are the prayers that, for the sake of a little bit of privacy, are inscribed on the back of the fabric that make the flames on our banners. We did something here together for us: we made art that we get to see and appreciate when we're in here. But in doing so, we also did something for other people—turning us from an inward focus on ourselves and each other, reorienting our vision so that we're looking outside ourselves, to the needs of all people, because all people are made in the image of God.

All throughout the Easter season up to and including this morning, we have been starting each week's worship by giving thanks for baptism, remembering that in baptism we receive the gift of the Spirit. Today we remember that the Spirit doesn't just light a fire in us, the Spirit lights a fire under us, to get us up and out and moving, working together not just for ourselves in here but for the sake of the whole world that God so loves. When, through our words and especially our actions, we share Jesus' vision of compassionate, generous, merciful, self-less service, we will at times be met by the same skepticism as the first apostles: *What, are you drunk?* But indeed not: it is the Spirit poured out on us, strengthening our hands to do God's work in all the world. May we grow and go out in whatever direction God sends us, guided by the Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom, peace, nourishment, and endurance for the journey.