

## Pentecost 2024 (Confirmation) Acts 2:1-21

Let me start right off by saying that even though our Acts reading invokes “portents in the heavens” and “the sun being turned to darkness” this is not a sermon about signs of the end times. Still, this has been an exciting season for the astronomy buffs among us: last month you could look to the heavens to see the solar eclipse; last weekend you could look to the heavens to see the Northern Lights; or, from my house, you could look to the heavens to see...clouds. I did appreciate having eclipse glasses to see the sliver of sun in that eerie afternoon semi-darkness, but it was nowhere near as impressive as what folks reported who watched from the path of totality. Last weekend I stayed up pretty late waiting for clear skies to see the best Northern Lights anyone could remember, and I did see an unusual glow in the night sky, but I can’t say for certain whether that was the aurora borealis or the fluorescent Walmart parking-lotus. What I can say is that it was nothing like the picture of the deep plum purple sky that my cousin sent from New Hampshire or the green and violet sky my friends saw in Iowa. The next day I scrolled through social media, post after post, of incredible videos and photographs of the auroras: starry skies with surreal colors; mountain lakes with perfect reflections of the lights... and I started getting cranky that I had missed out. Then I came across a tweet by someone I don’t even really know that started “I wasn’t close enough to experience the total eclipse or in a good latitude with clear enough skies to see the Northern Lights...” and I thought, *yes—that’s me exactly, finally someone to commiserate...* so I kept reading. Then she said, “But I am so grateful to live in this age of technology and global connection, so that I can enjoy all of the beautiful pictures from people who did see them”...and wow; I know social media is often a cesspool that plumbs the depths of human depravity, but that essentially anonymous internet comment was a sobering dose of gospel reality. It’s not all about *me*...it’s about all of us.

Luke tells us that after Jesus’ resurrection he spent 40 days visiting the disciples before ascending into heaven, and that the last thing he told them before he left was to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit who would empower them to be his witnesses throughout the world. For once, the disciples more or less do what they are told to do, so they are all together, waiting, until Pentecost, the Jewish festival that celebrated God inviting Israel into relationship through the gift of the Law. God—who was known to show up in wind and fire—blows the doors off the house where the disciples are waiting; the Spirit arrives as a rushing wind and appears as a flame above each of the disciples, inspiring them to speak in all the languages of those who are gathered from that list of places that Martie read this morning, representing all the communities of the known world.

The Parthians, Medes, Egyptians, and so forth are amazed and perplexed, except for the more cynical among them who assume the disciples had too much wine. So Peter gives a long, rambling, first attempt at a sermon; but instead of starting with scripture or witnessing to his personal experience with Jesus, Peter appeals to them with logic: *We can't be drunk, because it's only 9 o'clock in the morning...I mean...can't?...but Peter eventually hits his stride and because of his words, or in spite of his words, the Spirit moves 3,000 people to be baptized that day. So the church is off and running.*

Pentecost is sometimes referred to as the birthday of the church, but that's a little misleading. The church exists wherever people gather around Word and Sacrament, so we could say that the church really was born when Jesus broke bread with the disciples. But on Pentecost the church certainly receives a birthday present—the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice, however, this gift is not for the disciples to keep for themselves or even to hold within their little group. They don't speak in other languages as a fun party trick to show off to one another. The Spirit gifts them with this ability so they can communicate the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the people visiting from all those other nations—and we imagine those who hear taking that message back with them until it reaches the whole known world, that this is how the disciples become Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth, just as he promised.

So it is in that spirit of Pentecost we celebrate Confirmation of three of our young-going-on-not-so-young members: Max, Jay, and Camden, this part is about you—although really it's not *just* about you. Today isn't the day you become members of God's church; you were named and claimed in baptism long enough ago that you probably don't even remember it. Nor do we get to say “Ah-ha! St. Matthew's is three people stronger!” or “The Lutherans won a couple more!” Because today is not just about you affirming a life of faith within our little branch of the Vine. We will pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be stirred up in you, but not only for yourselves, and not only for the sake of this congregation, denomination, or even for the sake of the whole Christian church, but for you to be witnesses to the way of Jesus in the world. And I'll tell you a secret: the world doesn't need you to teach them the catechism; in a few minutes, we'll profess belief in the creed, but the world doesn't need you to recite to them the creed. The world needs you to take the love of God that we hope you have experienced in this faith community and to reflect it—where people are hurting, where people are hungry, where people are struggling, where people are afraid. Scripture is the long story of the people of God recognizing more and more fully that it's not about *me*, and that when we say *all of us* God always includes more people in that *all* than we think. So today and every day, may the Spirit work in and through us to be witnesses of God's love until the good news is good news for all.