



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora
May 28 2023 - Pentecost Sunday
Canon Paul Walker

The sound of a rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the speaking in new languages are all *visible* signs that accompany the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in Jerusalem. It all seems a bit chaotic, confusing and unexpected.

When Jesus left the disciples and ascended back to the Father they were told to go to Jerusalem to wait for the Spirit. How long they were to wait, they did not know. For what they were to wait for, they did not know. They were told to simply go to Jerusalem to pray and wait.

I don't *think* they were expecting what actually happened at 9 o'clock that morning on that particular day. That particular day was 50 days after Passover, the Feast of Shavuot, when the first fruits of the spring harvest were brought in. It is the culmination of seven weeks, the fulfillment of the Passover season, when God's covenant and revelation on Mount Sinai was celebrated.

The *first* passover celebrated God's deliverance of the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. The fulfillment of this passover, or deliverance, was

revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai when God called this rag-tag group of people to become a holy nation, a people set apart for himself. "I will be your God, and you will be my people."

The 50th day became significant. First century philosopher Philo called it the "sacred number of remission" because it was associated with the year of Jubilee, when debts would be cancelled every 50 years in Israel.

So for Christians, to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on this 50th day, a day of first fruits of the spring harvest, a day of fulfillment, a day of calling and clarity of purpose, and a day of remission of debts, is powerfully significant.

On this day the Spirit gives people the ability to speak of God's great deeds of power - namely the death and resurrection of Jesus - in languages that people could understand. Wherever they were from, people from different lands could understand what they were saying about this great exodus. The outpouring of the Spirit extends beyond the boundary of *one* exclusive group of people. Peter announces that it now encompasses *all* people.

This activity of the Holy Spirit is a further extension, or fulfillment, of the work of the

Incarnation. It is what Jesus has been talking about and doing all along: to gather in all the fish in the sea; to encompass the prodigal son meandering on the furthest reaches of the horizon; to enfold the lost sheep and find the lost coin; to heal and restore the one beaten up and left half dead in the ditch on the Jericho Road; to heal the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the oppressed; to cleanse the leper, raise the dead and to restore sight to the blind. This is what Jesus read aloud from the scriptures in the synagogue in his hometown right after his baptism.

So it is no wonder that, in the account of the resurrection in the gospel of John, when Jesus breathes on the disciples in the upper room he says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” and then talks about the remission and forgiveness of sin.

In the creeds the work of the Holy Spirit is extraordinary. It is described as gathering us in, connecting us to the saints on earth and in heaven, assuring us that we are forgiven and bringing us into the fellowship of the Father and Son.

All of this extraordinary work is largely invisible to us. But in churches, things that are eternal and invisible, are designed to become visible for us through the sacraments, and through the

architecture of the space, which if done well is intended to reinforce the message; to make these these eternal mysteries visible to us.

At St. John’s, what I can see from my perspective is what most of you often cannot see. You don’t see it until you go to leave this gathering. As you leave, if you look up over the door, you see the window of the Ascension. There is Jesus sitting on the throne as the King of Kings. And if you keep looking up, way up to the top of the ceiling, you see a tiny round window, much like the porthole in a ship, depicting the Holy Spirit coming down onto all those who enter and leave this space. So often not seen, but critically present.

In this season of Pentecost, I hope you have the vision to see the Spirit at work. Remember that when you entered the church through baptism and reaffirmed your baptismal promises through confirmation, a priest or a bishop prayed over you that the Holy Spirit would sustain you all the days of your life. So claim that promise: that you are forgiven, you are delivered, you are saved, you are called into a communion of saints, and you are sustained in this journey because you belong for all time to the Father and Son. For this we give thanks.