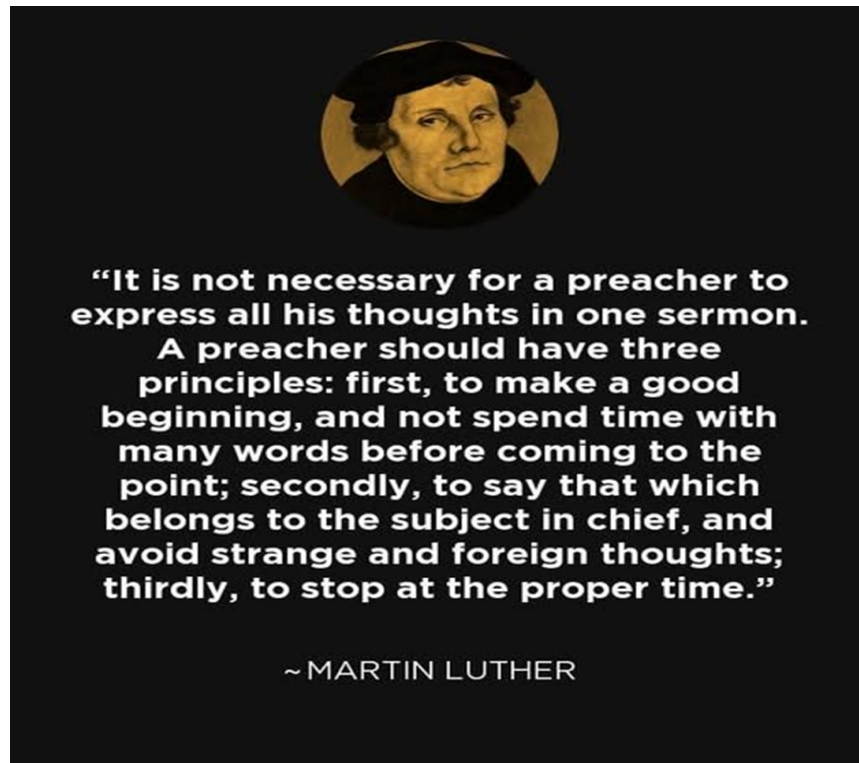


Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ – ascended.



I thought this would be a nice start from Martin Luther today. However, for the record I probably did not adhere to this.

As you listened to the readings today, did anyone notice that there are actually two distinctive stories of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in our readings today? If so, are any of you able to actually try to define what that distinctiveness is? Maybe we can try identifying how and when? In our first reading, we see how in the traditional story of the Spirit arriving is accompanied with fire and wind, and many of Jesus’ followers speaking in foreign languages those speakers were not expected to have knowledge of. The timing of this story is also clear that it occurred at the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, 50 days **after** Easter, hence why we celebrate today.

The second story, technically occurring first, is in our gospel reading from John. In this story the Spirit is transmitted by a simple, gentle, **almost** intimate breath from Jesus which is reminiscent of **God's** breath at creation. We have heard this story recently since it occurs the evening of Easter with many of the followers of Jesus in fear in a room behind locked doors. Any ideas why the different stories? I hope you realize this is really a context question. Before I look at that context, let me provide a broader, indirect context. Neither Matthew nor Mark have any post-resurrection references to Jesus meeting the disciples and other followers in a locked room the evening of Easter. In the 12 additional verses scholars do not consider as part of the original gospel of Mark, there is a **very** vague reference to such a possible event. Likewise, the Gospel of Luke does not have either a locked room or Holy Spirit story, therefore, **only** the Gospel of John has the locked room and Holy Spirit story on Easter evening. It is widely believed that the writer of the Gospel of Luke is also the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, so that writer may have simply chosen to put the story in Acts rather than his gospel account.

So, let us return to the specific context question around the two distinctive stories. First, who is the author and to whom are they writing? Luke is a gentile writing primarily to gentiles. John is an Israelite writing to other Israelites from a divinity based theology of Jesus. Second, based on that information, is there a difference in the narrative and the theology of the writings? Luke and Acts are essentially about the Good News being for the gentiles as well as the Israelites. John, on the other hand, is a theological treatise on Jesus' divinity, that Jesus is, in fact, a part of the Godhead. Third, one story occurs in a private setting while the other is very much a public setting. Fourth, the private setting story is to persons who intimately knew the Hebrew scriptures and would easily connect the breath to the creation story. Whereas, the story in Acts was to persons who did not know or understand the Hebrew God and would be looking for some kind of sign that a God was involved in this story. There are churches that teach the need for outward signs of salvation and infilling of the Holy Spirit which would be in keeping with the Acts story. On the other hand, the John story can remind us our relationship with God does not require some big, explosive experience but rather some quiet, private experience of God is just as powerful. This idea is supported by Paul's comments on gifts in our second reading from First Corinthians. Paul says in verse 11, "**All these are activated by one and the same Spirit.**" Paul is talking explicitly about gifts of the Spirit, but I believe the application can be **broader** to include anything involved with our relationship with God and the Holy Spirit.

By the way, our second reading is part of a 3 chapter section in First Corinthians that create difficulties for many Christians. The primary reason for the difficulties is that many try to treat the middle chapter, Chapter 13, as its own. Last Sunday in our adult education class, our presenter talked about these 3 chapters as part of an integral thought process for Paul. This very thought was stated by Stephen Chester in his commentary on this reading today where he said, "First Corinthians 12 – 14 is a major unit of material. It focuses on how the gifts of the Spirit are being used in worship at Corinth." Stephen goes on to say that Paul's fundamental concern is to insist that it is the Spirit who distributes all gifts and that all Christians have received the Spirit. Stephen Chester also says that Paul insists that how the gifts are used must be shaped by love, hence chapter 13, and that the true index of greatness lies in concern for the community.

We have had our gospel reading at other times with other liturgical outlooks. Matt Skinner outlines this reading in his commentary on it this week. His outline goes, first, Jesus bestows peace upon Jesus' worried followers, and then Jesus fills them with the Holy Spirit, and finally Jesus tells them they can forgive or retain other people's sins. This last comes from the one verse zinger at the end of our reading today. In the past, I have said that this is a heavy load for one to bear and especially when considering other verses in the Bible suggest we will be judged by how we judge. Matt Skinner, however, paints a different picture of this verse. Matt says, "Jesus is not appointing the church as a moral watchdog; nor does Jesus commission it to arbitrate people's assets and liabilities on a heavenly balance sheet." There are, of course, many churches who choose to do this. Matt goes on to say that in John's gospel, Jesus talks about sin as unbelief, the unwillingness or incapacity to grasp the truth of God manifested to the world. Sin in John is **not** moral failings; primarily it is an inability or refusal to recognize God's revelation when confronted with it. Or in Ron's words, sin is the refusal or inability to be in relationship with God.

In our Pentecost story from our first reading from Acts today, there is a whole lot of interaction between Jesus' followers and the world and Peter gives a powerful and unexpected speech, and then comes what I think is almost as important a simple statement as Jesus' simple description last week of eternal life. Verse 21 says, "**Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be save.**" I want you to notice that there is no defined method nor timeline for this calling on the name of the Lord. How and when this happens is only between an individual and God. This says three things to me, first there is no way for us to know about someone else's God relationship, so second, it is none of **our** business, and third, we have no reason to try to make it our business. Jesus describes **our** business in Jesus' two great commandments; first to love God, and second to love others – all others and all creation – as we love ourselves.

We have been here 40 months and I believe God brought us here to help you heal from past and future events. I think it is important you also know that sometimes pastors need help healing as well. You may even call a pastor who needs help healing. They may not know it and you might not know it at the time of call, but I am sure you are now in a place spiritually where you can identify this possibility and take the appropriate action required to effect the healing.

Hear then the Good News:

You are a child of God.

We are children of God.

The question is are we in relationship with God?

Change comes. Change **is** coming.

Is any change you, we are experiencing more significant than the change the disciples experienced?

Death came.

Then came the resurrection.

The ascension followed.

Then comes the Holy Spirit.

The pattern does not change.

Every action of God pre-supposes that there is **something** to follow.

There are **no** endings, just new beginnings.

Welcome and treat Lesley like you have welcomed and treated Nanette and I.

Prepare for and diligently seek a new called pastor.

Change is happening – trust God.

Thank you for your graciousness and love.



This Naked Pastor drawing shows a variety of individuals having food and fun together.

I pray this image for you.

Grace and peace to you my friends, enjoy God – enjoy life – care for and enjoy each other.

Amen