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Glen Ridge Congregational Church



Sunday, May 24, 2026  
Acts 2:1- 21

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

I've said it before, and I will say it again, the story of Pentecost, the story of God's Spirit being poured out on Jesus' followers, the story of the birth of the church, contains one of the funniest lines, at least for me, in all of the Christian scriptures.

It starts with a miracle. Just as Jesus predicted when he left the disciples and ascended to sit with God in heaven, God sends the Holy Spirit to the disciples, and it doesn't just arrive among them; it fills them and sets their minds on fire. And then they begin speaking, and all of the Jews from around the world who are gathered in Jerusalem, somehow can understand exactly what the friends of Jesus are saying. And they respond in different ways: some of those diaspora Jews wonder at what they witness, and are curious about what is going on; others simply dismiss it out of hand, accusing the disciples of being drunk.

And this is when I have to laugh. There is Peter, hot-headed petulant Peter, who tartly responds they can't be drunk because it's only nine o'clock in the morning. If Peter had ever been to New Orleans, he might not offer the time as the proof that one could not be drinking in public early in the morning. Not that I would know anything about that.

But kidding aside, how do we know when God's spirit comes to those of us trying to follow Jesus' words and example? Because a lot of people claim the Spirit, and a lot of people do things in Jesus' name, and not all of it is good.

It's fascinating that those who are not filled with the Spirit themselves in this story see the disciples, and what they are up to, and respond with wonder and dismissal. The word some use to describe the disciples' actions is "intoxication". It's a word that is also used to describe love. To be intoxicated is to release the importance of some of the many things that our world considers of value, and to settle your mind and heart only on its beloved object. It is to act differently, speak differently, think differently. It is to look to those outside of you as if you, the person they know, has been poisoned – in – toxic – ated – and has passed away and been replaced by someone new.

The disciples stand in the early morning sun of Jerusalem so long ago, and the Holy Spirit comes and fills them, and in love, their former selves pass away, and they become new people who act and speak and think differently than they did just minutes ago. Under the influence of God's Spirit – and I think it is interesting that one of the words we use to describe alcohol is "spirits" - under the influence of God's Spirit, Jesus' followers are enlightened by God's presence and love and are met by those around them with wonder, or derision.

On this Pentecost day, I wonder if this congregation is under the influence, and has become intoxicated by God's love and presence. Because these ancient stories we hear every Sunday aren't worth much if we can't see them opening our eyes to our experience, even here, even today.

I think of those who have looked at our partnership with the Northeast Earth Coalition to manage our Gracefully Green Garden, which provides fresh and healthy produce to our neighbors in need. Some look at what we are doing there with enthusiasm and wonder. Someone also asked me why we waste our time, because it's not going to solve the bigger problem of food insecurity that plagues our nation.

I think of the giant new Pride flag we just put up on the front of our church, which proclaims the sanctity and welcome of LGBTQI+ people in this church. For some, they wonder at the progress our church has made in opening its shared heart more widely and deeply. Others have perhaps left because they thought we had become drunk on "wokeness".

I think of this church committing ourselves to always keeping this place open and available to our neighbors so that they will be invited to hear Jesus remind us of his commandment to love God with all we have, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Some people wonder if we can really keep the doors to our church open in the long term. Some think our message is quaint in a time when exercising raw power is the currency of the day.

I think of how we are rolling out a Safe Church policy to protect our children, and covenant with each other how we will be in relationship together. I hear some in our church wonder why it wasn't done sooner. I hear others frustrated with what they see as more unnecessary red tape.

The coming and presence of God's Spirit creates something new, and enlivens those who try to follow Jesus on his way of hope and compassion. It changes what was into what will be. But God's Spirit can't be seen or measured directly. We can only apprehend it indirectly, and I think measure it by the love and reconciliation it creates.

In partnering with NEEC to grow food in our garden are we showing love and care for our neighbor, even if not all are fed? Absolutely.

Does flying the Pride flag outside our church continue the work of reconciliation and repentance between the church and God's LGBTQI+ children? Absolutely.

Does preaching and living into love and humility in the face of greed and the politics of power proclaim that God is truly sovereign? Absolutely.

Does ensuring our children are safe, and that we treat each other with respect and dignity, worth creating some new policies and procedures? Absolutely.

I think today is our season of Pentecost because the Spirit of love and compassion is inviting us to new life together, and with our neighbors. And I call this Spirit holy because it is bringing people together, not separating. It is challenging us to remember the inherent sacredness of each other. It is faithful to the commandments of Christ.

And it may seem crazy to some. It may seem like we have become drunk. And I will say we have - unapologetically, unenthusiastically, unreservedly. And it is my hope that it will always be nine o'clock in the morning here in this church, and with you. And that we will never experience that awkward moment when the lights come up and our Divine bartender announces, "Last Call".

Amen.