**Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway**

**United Church of Christ Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817**

**Online Worship & Sermon May 31, 2020**

**PENTECOST SUNDAY**

PRELUDE Jieun Kim Newland

Introduction and Choral Variations I, II, and III on Veni Creator' (Come Holy Spirit) |

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

ANNOUNCEMENTS Lori Yamashiro

SUNDAY SCHOOL PRESENTATION OF

***The Story of Pentecost***

OPENING SENTENCES

God’s presence is like a mighty wind that sweeps in to infuse us with Spirit, urging us to vision, dream, and journey. So, listen, wonder, abide. Let us offer to God our yearning for renewal—in the world, the church, and our life. Let us invite the gift of the Spirit’s presence to find voice in our lives, that our babbling may be transformed into discernment, and the flickering of many tongues light an unquenchable fire for compassion and justice.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Let us pray:*

Holy God,

like the rushing wind, your Spirit moved upon

the first disciples

on the day of Pentecost,

and like a purifying fire, your Spirit seared

their hearts and minds with the message of salvation.

Send your Spirit upon your church in this

time and place,

stir up our courage, and rouse us for prophetic witness,

that we may join with them

to proclaim to the world your mighty deeds of power

in Jesus Christ. Amen.

PASSING THE PEACE OF GOD

A READING FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURE Mae Au

Acts 2:1-21 *“The Coming of the Holy Spirit”*

1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ 13But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:   
17 “In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
   and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
   and your old men shall dream dreams.   
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
   in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
     and they shall prophesy.   
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above  
   and signs on the earth below,  
     blood, and fire, and smoky mist.   
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness  
   and the moon to blood,  
     before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.   
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

SERMON *“Come, Holy Spirit!”* Pastor Jeannie Thompson

This book, the Acts of the Apostles, lays great emphasis on the prophecy, will, purpose and plan of God—for example, Peter points out in today’s passage that the coming of the Holy Spirit “is what was spoken through the (Old Testament) prophet Joel” [2:16]. Jesus’ coming, his death and resurrection, the descent of the Spirit, the growth of the church, the proclamation of the good news to the Gentiles—what this story is telling us is that all of this has been a part of God’s unfolding plan. As one commentator has put it: “our Creating, Saving, Redeeming, Inspiring God proves again and again that God is in control,” even through the flux and tumble of history itself. This is what is made evident throughout this familiar yet fantastic story of Pentecost.

By the way, as you also saw: the children of this church are beautiful. They and their parents are also really good sports to take on the first telling of the Pentecost story today. The challenge for the adults was how to help the children learn and tell the story without it being too complicated. Therefore, portraying this day as a birthday party for the church was the most straight-forward way of helping them understand what is going on: this day is a celebration.

And it really is a birthday story, of sorts. It is a story that tells us about the point at which the first believers were united and inspired in a way they had not been before. When the Spirit came upon them, the disciples were suddenly, and very effectively, *made* ready to tell the story of Christ to all the world. They were, finally, one people with a mission. It was, indeed, the birth of something new.

I was told that one of our children was not sure how a church could have a birthday—but at this point, bewilderment or confusion is fine, it is a start. My own hope is that the confusion will inspire questions—questions are good. They are a way on drawing closer to a person or gaining knowledge about a new topic.

The first people who had *not* experienced that first descent of the Spirit—the ones who were *not* in the room with the disciples—they, too, were bewildered, and perhaps that is just as well inasmuch as the descent of the Spirit was not terribly gentle.

The Bible says that that first wind blew *violently* through the crowd of disciples. The people outside had not seen or heard that. They had not heard the rushing of the wind as it came roaring through every window, every crack and crevice in the building. When I really think about it, I am reminded of the news stories on television after a tornado has swept through a community. The sound survivors tell of is of a roaring that was scary—not reassuring, not at all friendly.

The on-lookers that first Pentecost had also not seen the flames falling out of the sky. In fact, it is to the credit of those disciples that they held still as the Spirit-flames came and rested upon them. Most of us would run!

All those first on-lookers saw was a large group of people pouring out of an upper room and into the streets. The disciples had to have been excited—they had just experienced something no one else ever had. I can imagine them eager and breathe-less, aching to share what had just happened to them.

And what a great time *for* it to have happened! They were just at the start of an important time of the year in the Jewish calendar. Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims present for the annual celebration of the spring grain harvest, the Festival of First Fruits—a festival that brought in visitors from every diaspora community. They all would have come to celebrate at the Temple.

In Luke’s telling of it this gathering included Jews from “every nation under heaven.” The geographical information Luke provides in verses 8-11 serves to depict for us the presence of the whole world as witnesses to the Holy Spirit’s first outpouring to the disciple community.

However, despite what has happened to the disciples, what happens next is the real miracle: the disciples—all of them—were able to speak to all of the by-standers in their own language! They were given the gift of communication. The Holy Spirit’s first act is to break-down barriers and empower the disciples—the brand new church—with a voice that could speak to the whole world.

When you think about it, it is not unlike what we—you and I are experiencing right now. We have been divided—separated from one another for several months now. However, we were also given the gift of communication even though we cannot be together in person. Two thousand years later and the Holy Spirit is still at work in our context—still finding a way to bring people together, still making a way for the story to be told in a way we can “hear” and understand!

Does that sound too fantastic to be true?

I can well-imagine that this may sound like a stretch. However, what I would like for us all to consider is that the story of God is always a story of God drawing close to us. God stories are always stories of how God has, and is, breaking down what we thought were barriers and bringing us together. God stories are always stories of how God has, and is, making us ready.

In this morning’s story, the disciples were made ready by being made able to speak to everyone. And like I said, the Spirit did not come upon them gently. It swept in and took over!

During these past couple of months, you and I have started worshiping, conducting meetings, and communicating in ways that were available to us before the pandemic began, but which we did not take full advantage of before. It was not until the pandemic prodded us forward that the Spirit reminded us that we had resources, and we began to use this technology.

We have been taken over again. The good news is that we are finding out that we have a lot more resources that we realized. We are finding out that we *can* learn and do new things. We are just like the people we heard about in the Bible. It is our story, too.

So, what else is there in store for us?

Well, let us consider Peter’s story. A couple of months before this story happened to him, Peter was timid and afraid. Even after traveling with Christ from the start of his ministry and seeing all that Christ did—all of the healing, feeding, teaching, all of the miracles—when Jesus was arrested Peter was frightened into silence.

Suddenly, here in this story, Peter finds his voice; the Holy Spirit’s presence in him *gives* Peter his voice. It is a voice so vital and so powerful that he is able to bring three thousand people to belief. Three thousand are baptized and brought into fellowship.

God gave Peter a voice to communicate God’s dearest message to those first believers and to us.

God’s good news is that our God is a God who longs to draw all people into God’s love and mercy—men and women, old and young, servants and free are God’s beloved people whom God’s Holy Spirit can and does make ready; all a special, spiritually gifted priesthood.

Moreover, according to Joel’s prophecy, which Peter invokes as evidence of the new age that has now begun, all are eligible to “prophesy”—all are able to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The gift at Pentecost is the stunning message of true equality and reciprocity among all people in the Spirit.

That includes us, too. All these centuries later, we, too, are being given this gift. We, too, are being given this message of God’s empathy for us, and the empathy we are meant to have for one another. The Spirit gave Peter and the others—just as the Spirit is giving us—a message to proclaim to all the world about God’s love and support, and God’s justice for all people.

Our good news—which the first disciples did *not* have—is that we have so much history to draw upon as we discern the mission God is calling us to now, in our context.

We have the this story we heard today, and all of the other stories—all of the acts of the apostles in this book of the Bible and in and throughout the letters preserved for us, for our edification and building-up.

We also have the unique and amazing stories of the Gospel as it came to these islands two hundred years ago. The stories of the missionaries and the sacrifices they made to come and bring the story of Christ are stories of power that still bring gratitude and humility to all who read their history.

At last, there are the stories of the beginning of each of our churches. Nu‘uanu Congregational Church has some wonderful stories to tell of how the Spirit has moved in the lives of our ancestors in the faith—and their stories are now ours as well; our example; their legacy to us.

And lest you think it is a story of days past, I would like to invite you to think about the Nu‘uanu YMCA, just down the road from our church. NCC’s history and the Nu‘uanu Y are forever tied together. Their history of service to countless thousands is part of our history too. Right now, in real time, they have been providing child care for the children of essential workers who have been working throughout this pandemic.

The Spirit is still moving, still calling to us, still able and ready to reach out into the community in powerful ways through our church. It has been done before. It is being done even now. Even now, we are being made ready, and together, we will be meet God’s future. So, celebrate! Pray! And let us say it together: Come, Holy Spirit!

Let it be so! Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION & THE LORD’S PRAYER

*Let there be a brief time of silence after each petition.*

Almighty God, Creator, Heavenly Parent of our Savior:

We glorify you today for the gift and power of your Spirit.  
We recall with awe how your Spirit brooded over the primeval chaos,

how carefully you fashioned the world with all its wonders out of that chaos,

how lovingly you imprinted us with your own image.  
We praise you for the spectacular outpouring of your Spirit at the first Pentecost

and for the launching of Christ’s church in power and miraculous unity.  
We magnify your holy name for numberless, unspectacular Pentecosts

in the life of the church through the centuries,

and in the lives of Christian men and women who felt a surge of power

when they needed it most for witness: in prison or in the arena,

before a scoffing crowd or a lynch mob.  
We thank you, righteous God, for your Spirit’s might

in convicting us of sin again and again, when we become smug, self-

righteous, lazy, callous, holier-than-thou.

We praise you for your Spirit’s skill in reminding us that self-interest

often underlies our seemingly finest deeds.

We give you thanks for the mirror of your Spirit,

in which we see ourselves not as others see us but,

far more disturbingly, as you see us.  
We glorify you, merciful God, for your Spirit’s ministry of comfort.

We pray that friends and loved ones

of whose present illness or other need we know,

as well as others of whose needs we may be unaware,

may experience the reassuring, healing presence of your Spirit;

and that those whose life is nearing its end

may find strength and renewal of faith

in your Spirit’s unshaken witness to that life which,

for Christians, begins at death.  
Gracious God, let this day and this service

become a personal Pentecost for many of us.

Renew the church beginning with us;

with each of us and with all of us.

And stir us through your Spirit to proclaim the Good News of your

faithfulness and love in new and effective ways.  
We pray in the name of him to whom your Spirit bears witness,

the Lord of Pentecost, the Redeemer of the world,

our Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray say,

*“Our Creator who art in heaven…”*

DOXOLOGY Russell Ishida, trumpet solo

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;*

*Praise God all creatures here below;*

*Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*Praise God above, ye heavenly host;*

*Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.*

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

**BENEDICTION**

May the grace of God bless you with peace,

the love of Christ sustain you in joy,

and may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you with

boldness and a willingness to follow.

Bless the Lord! Alleluia and Amen!

POSTLUDE Jieun Kim Newland

Choral Variation IV ‘Toccata’ on Veni Creator' (Come Holy Spirit) |

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)