

*Pentecost Perspectives*

John 20:19-23; 14:25-26

Sunday, May 31, 2020, Pentecost

Beargrass Christian Church

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. Good morning—and again, Happy Pentecost!
  - 1. Or can we say happy anything during these crazy times?
  - 2. We had a pandemic Easter; this is our first pandemic Pentecost.
  - 3. So...what are your latest longings and latest lessons learned?
- B. We have a church member who maintains a sense of humor even during difficult times—and she often sends me emails.
- C. Here are some of her pandemic perspectives...
  - 1. Some have to do with self-medication.
    - a. She said: “Never in my life did I imagine that my hands would consume more alcohol than my mouth.”
    - b. “There is nothing like a little tomato soup to soothe the soul, even if it’s cold, over ice, with a celery stick, and some....”
  - 2. Others have to do with food and dining more often at home.”
    - a. “Wearing a mask in our homes is now recommended—not to prevent COVID 19—but to keep us from eating too much.” (She’s dealing with the “Quarantine 15.”)
    - b. She said: “My pants buttons have started social distancing.”
  - 3. Others are about “opening up” and some general observations.
    - a. “Casinos are now offering curbside pick-up; call ahead and they will come out and take your money right from your car.”
    - b. “2020 is a unique Leap Year—there were 29 days in February, 5 Saturdays in February, and 500 days in May.”
- D. Speaking of 2020, let’s step back and take a look at the big picture.
  - 1. We are in a year-long emphasis called “2020 Vision.”
  - 2. When we hear the number “2020,” we can’t help but think of eyesight—so it has made sense to embrace it thematically.
  - 3. So far, we have thought about “The Eyes of Epiphany,” “The Lens of Lent,” and “Recognizing Resurrection.”
- E. Today we begin a series called “Pentecost Perspectives.”
  - 1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Pentecost?”
  - 2. As you know, Pentecost is the longest “season” of the Church by far, stretching for months from May until December.
  - 3. But what is it all about and what are we to do with it?
  - 4. Where does it “rank” among Church holidays and celebrations?
  - 5. Does it get less attention because businesses can’t market it?
  - 6. I checked several stores—I saw no “Happy Pentecost!” cards.
  - 7. Some of us might say that it has something to do with the Spirit, but we are not sure about the implications of that gift.

- F. So, I will begin the series with a couple of messages about the gift of the Spirit to the disciples and the early Church—and us!
  - 1. In the Gospel of John, it comes peacefully and privately.
  - 2. In the story in Acts, the Spirit comes powerfully and publicly.
- G. And I confess that on Pentecost Sunday, I have never used the passage from John—the Acts 2 story is much more exciting!
  - 1. But during these times, is John’s story more appropriate?
  - 2. Do we need to consider what the gift means for us personally?
  - 3. How can we view and live life as “Spirit-filled” people of faith?
  - 4. With that foundation, let’s focus on the “Pentecost Effect.”

## II. **WE HAVE SET THE TABLE; LET’S TURN TO THE TEXT.**

- A. In today’s story we find the disciples in quarantine.
  - 1. There is a serious persecution pandemic virus going around.
  - 2. They are doing what they think is best to try to stay alive.
  - 3. And they are following the Phase One guidelines.
  - 4. Judas and Thomas aren’t there, so there are 10 in the group.
  - 5. They are afraid, scared, uncertain—and in lockdown mode.
  - 6. But they are together and are trying to make the best of it.
- B. This may be the model for something we still do in church?
  - 1. It remains a favorite for children and young people—and it is perhaps one of the most demanding for sponsors and ministers!
  - 2. The event is the “lock-in”—and the concept is simple.
  - 3. The group is “locked-in” for the night and everyone participates in a variety of programs and games and worship.
  - 4. The next day, parents pick up their sleepless, weary children.
  - 5. Sponsors and pastors go home to take a nap and recover.
  - 6. So, if you are in lockdown mode—just pretend it’s a lock-in!
- C. The disciples are having a “lock-in” of their own—on Easter Sunday evening of all times—usually there are no meetings.
  - 1. Then someone crashes the party, breaking the “lock-in” rules!
  - 2. Out of the blue, Jesus appears and says, “Peace be with you.”
  - 3. Right? After his friends get up off the floor, Jesus repeats the peace offering—and then he breathes on them.
  - 4. Now he’s really messing with the healthy at home guidelines—he is no masked man, he is definitely not social distancing...
  - 5. Then he breathes on them— isn’t that odd for the Son of God?
  - 6. But God’s people do some strange things from time to time.
- D. Did you see the story about the 70-year-old priest in Detroit?
  - 1. Unlike Jesus, he was trying to maintain social distancing.
  - 2. He encouraged members of his flock to come by the church for drive-by shootings—of holy water from a squirt gun!
  - 3. But he was covered—with a mask, face shield, and gloves.

4. Of course, his creative efforts have gone viral—and he confesses that he is concerned about how the Vatican might react.
  5. But isn't that crazy—it's like passing out Pentecost pinwheels to church children...or having Jesus breathe on you...
- E. But this Jesus-breath is extraordinary—and it is just part of the gift.
1. He also says to his befuddled friends, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
  2. This is peculiar, so let's do a little pondering and wondering.
- F. Where else in the Bible do we read about these kinds of images?
1. Do you recall the story of the creation of humanity in Genesis?
  2. God formed the human of dust from the ground and breathed into this new being the breath of life.
  3. A similar picture is in Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones.
  4. Zeke heard God say to the wind: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain...that they may live."
- G. When Jesus breathes on the disciples, it is Genesis breath, Creation breath, the Breath of New Life—Resurrection Breath.
1. As he breathes on them, he says, "Receive the Holy Spirit!"
  2. Jesus awakens the disciples from the dead, breathes new life into them, and gives birth to the church—privately, intimately.
  3. In John 20, Matthew's Great Commission and Acts 2's giving of the Spirit to the disciples are closely interwoven.
  4. If you blink, you will miss it—but it is there—look closely!
  5. Here is the fulfillment of Jesus' promises in John 14-16.
  6. This breath-giving, breath-taking experience transforms them!
- H. Relish these eloquent images about breath from Barbara Brown Taylor.
1. She says: "We breathe the same air that Plato breathed, as well as Mozart and Michelangelo, Bach and Beethoven.
  2. "Every time we breathe, we take in what was once some baby's first breath...or some dying person's last.
  3. "When Jesus let go of his last breath—willingly, we believe, for love of us—that breath hovered in the air in front of him...
  4. "It hovered just for a moment...then it was set loose on earth.
  5. "It was such pungent breath—so full of passion, so full of life—that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do.
  6. "It grew, in strength and volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through the world."

### III. THESE GIFTS OF PENTECOST ARE ALSO GIVEN TO US.

- A. But sometimes we are hesitant to accept the gifts.
1. Some of us miss the joy of resurrection living.
  2. We are like the disciples with closed curtains and locked doors.
  3. But he breaks through, speaking words of assurance and peace.
  4. His breath can give us the confidence and courage to proclaim the Good News of life over death and good over evil.

5. The Spirit can give us the determination and strength to take risks in our lives that will bring God's light and love to others.
  6. And there is the beauty of this story...gifts are given...
  7. Peace, Spirit, Commission...and we are to respond.
- B. And God's people have been doing just that for centuries!
1. Studies show that more Christians are alive today than ever.
  2. This is due to the growth of the human population—and the remarkable expansion of the faith in new parts of the world.
  3. Christianity went viral at Pentecost and it hasn't stopped!
  4. Some people will even point to the steady, stubborn growth of the Church as proof and evidence for God's existence.
  5. How else do we explain how such an unlikely group of folks as Jesus' disciples could ever start a worldwide movement?
  6. And it is a joy today to celebrate over 1000 new churches that have been started in our own denomination since we accepted the "2020 Challenge" some years ago.
  7. This Spirit-led life can be rewarding and it can be risky.
  8. But we are called to respond in our words and actions to be and become the people God has called us to be!
- C. We saw a powerful example last week in the response of our Governor to the despicable display of behavior at our Capitol.
1. Andy said: "I will not be afraid. And I will not back down."
  2. He spoke the truth as he called out people who are responsible.
  3. He said: "You cannot fan the flames and then condemn the fire."
  4. His wife, Britainy, reminded us of something we too often forget: "Love always wins over hate."
  5. Their comments and their courage are grounded in their faith.
- D. Our hearts are also aching and breaking from what has happened on the streets of Minneapolis and in our own city this past week.
1. Recent incidents fall into a long history of systemic racism.
  2. There are too many inciters-in-chief and igniters-in-chief—some obvious and some not so obvious—who are fanning the wrong flames.
  3. But people are rising up to counter bigotry and oppression.
- E. Desmond Tutu said: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."
- F. Martin Luther King Jr. faced the same kinds of battles.
1. He said: "We will have to repent in this generation—not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people...
  2. "But for the appalling silence of the good people."
  3. His words remind us that it is our turn to rise up and respond.
- G. Friends, we are good people—we are Pentecost people!
1. We are to fan the flames of compassion in the face of hate.
  2. We are to fan the flames of hope in the midst of despair.
  3. We are to fan the flames of respect when there is great incivility.

4. We are to fan the flames of justice when there is oppression.
5. We are to fan the flames of truth when falsehoods abound.
6. We are to fan the flames of unity when chaos confounds us.
7. We are to fan the flames of life and light and love!
8. We are Spirit-filled, Spirit-inspired, and Spirit-empowered!
9. Jesus says: "Peace be with you. God sent me. Now I am sending you."