

May 23, 2021
Rev. Kerry Smith

Romans 8:22-27 Celebrate the Holy Spirit
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Romans 8:22-27

New Revised Standard Version

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Today is Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter, when we celebrate that the Holy Spirit came with a violent wind and divided tongues of fire (whatever that means). All kinds of languages were being spoken with energy and passion. People from different countries, men and women, young and old, all loudly talking about how God has been at work in their lives. They were offering testimonies of how God healed them and set them free. They heard how God was moving in the world and gave them the courage to join in what God was doing.

Today we celebrate our graduating seniors. Many of them have grown up in this church. They have seen and felt God's grace and mercy in this place. They have been taught by you and loved by you. They have seen how following Jesus makes a difference in people's lives by seeing how each one of you live your lives. By being a part of this family of faith, they have felt where God was calling them to make a difference in their world. We pray for them today as they continue their journey out into the world.

On that Pentecost day the disciples were all just minding their own business. They had seen how speaking out against the powers to be had gotten Jesus killed. So they were staying close to one another, praying and quietly setting up the structure for their new group, when something like a holy windstorm began to blow all around them. Next thing they know, they are speaking in all of these different languages about God's powerful deeds in their world. And this Spirit infusion causes such a commotion that strangers from the streets start to elbow their way into the room. Outsiders lean in through the windows. It was a wide variety of God's creation who were curious that day: rich and poor, from all walks of life, all different shades and colors. They were all in the city to observe the Jewish festival of Pentecost. So when all of those different people heard the racket and recognized their mother tongues, they rushed to see what was happening.

Parthians pushed their way through the door expecting to see other Parthians in the room. Libyans stuck their heads around looking for the other Libyans. Women and men from Crete stopped and stared, hearing their own language. What on earth was going on? They came expecting to find their own kind, but discovered Galilean country folk speaking their languages. What was happening? In response to those questions, Peter took a deep breath of courage and started preaching, interpreting the moment. These people are not drunk. It is not spirits but Spirit. They are living out what God promised through the prophet Joel, that the day would come when all kinds of people, not just those who make the rules, will see visions and dream dreams. And on that day, they will speak aloud all that God is doing to bring about the healing of the world. It is happening right now. Right here.

In the middle of that holy chaos, the church was birthed into being. Before the chaos people were uncertain of what the future held and they were afraid to speak up. They knew Jesus had been raised from the dead, but no one knew how to talk about it and they didn't have the

courage to try. Then the Holy Spirit took over and the church breathed in courage, stood up, and spoke. The Spirit moved the church from silence to language. The church talked, and the whole world started to hear the good news of the gospel. The good news that proclaims that no matter what the world tries to tell you, life is stronger than death, hope is deeper than despair, and in the power of Christ's resurrection, death and pain will be no more. From that Pentecost moment on, to speak that Spirit-infused, gospel Word into the brokenness and tragedy of the world became the gift and the responsibility of the church, of us.

Today we will pray for our graduates and send them out into the world. They will be charged, as we all are, with talking about how being a follower of Jesus changes their life. We have been given the gift and the responsibility to talk about why being a part of an open and affirming, creative and compassionate family of faith matters. Our church family is rooted in God's love, growing in Christ, and reaching out with compassion and justice. The gift of our baptism and our discipleship as a follower of Jesus moves us out into the world to work for justice, to be a voice for those whose voices are not heard, to advocate for those still on the margins and not seen, to leverage whatever power we have to help create a more just, a more merciful, a more hope-filled world.

Today we hear about what the Holy Spirit did 2,000 years ago, but the passage we read from Romans assures us that the Holy Spirit is alive today in us. Paul tells us in that passage the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains. We hear those groans from creation in pollution, overpopulation, and the inequitable distribution of food and resources. If we were to put those groans into words, we would have a long list of things we are dissatisfied with in our broken world: global terrorism, wars raging around the world, sexual exploitation of women and children, modern-day slavery, oppressive regimes, gang crime, drug and alcohol abuse, marital and family distress, incurable diseases, pandemics. We can't even list all of the problems to be met by people in our world today. Perhaps the best we can do is groan, sigh, hope, and do the next right thing to make the world better.

We hope for what we have been promised in faith, but do not yet see. We pray, but it often we don't even have words for our prayers, because there is so much we want to improve. We want a just and kind world and we look around us and see the opposite. When the weight of our concerns is too much, the Holy Spirit is there to carry our burdens for us.

We are to stand up and speak. To breathe in God's courage and to offer hope and love into the brokenness and tragedy of the world. The Spirit will give us courage and sustain us. We never know when the Spirit will move next. We just know She will. Thanks be to God, Amen.