

Sermon – John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15; Romans 8:22-27

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Grace Lutheran Church

Pentecost – Year B

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“Groaning and Sighing, Living Not Dying”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. There are a great many things that I love about being your pastor, but perhaps my favorite moment each day is leaving. Not because it's nice to get away from you (although there are times), but because it means I'm going home. I love walking through our front door, waiting for our children to hear my footsteps, and then hearing their footsteps pounding toward me as they come running to welcome me home with a hug. I know that in a few years, they won't be quite as excited to see me, so I cherish these moments. Moments when they rush at me. And sometimes, as one or another of them rushes at me, running at full speed and about to jump into the air under the assumption that I'll catch them – which I almost always do! – I don't experience only that moment. I see the future rushing at me. I see what might one day come to pass through the lives of my children. And I'm sure it won't all happen; Anders likely won't be both an orthopedic surgeon and the starting shortstop for the Kansas City Royals. Nevertheless, these moments of children rushing at me give me a vision of what the future might hold, and in that moment, any pain in the present gives way to the freedom of the future.
2. Today is Pentecost, and something is rushing toward us. Luke tells of the followers of Jesus, gathered together. Waiting. “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.” The Holy Spirit, that Advocate that Jesus promised he would send to us from the Father, fell upon the believers from heaven, and the community of believers, the church, was

- called into being. But the Holy Spirit does not simply fall from heaven; the Spirit comes from another direction, too. The late theologian Robert Jenson writes that the Holy Spirit is God's future rushing in on God and us. The Spirit is the future of God, the future for God's people, that comes to us in the present – both to comfort us with the hope that the present is not all there is, but also to bring that future into our now, creating the Kingdom among us today.
3. God's future pounds across our living room floors and throws itself at us, grabbing hold of us and opening us to the Spirit's work. But it is a future that is always grounded in the past; specifically in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ – the same Lord who has gone away so that the Spirit could come to us; so that Christ might live and move, no longer bound by space and time, but incarnate everywhere and every when. The future of the Spirit that rushes in upon us does not so much create something new as it makes the work of the cross and the reality of the empty tomb the defining marks of creation. It is this Spirit that continues to shape us, to mold us, to teach us the truth of the future that proves our present reality wrong – wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. Wrong about sin, which is not so much the sum total of our failings and wrongs but is our failure to fully believe in the God of Jesus Christ. Wrong about righteousness, which we insist on thinking is our need to prove ourselves good enough, when in reality it is simply the gospel of Jesus, who in his love has died for us, and *that* is good enough. Wrong about judgment, which this world passed upon Jesus, consigning him and his message of love to death. But it turned out that the death of Jesus wasn't a judgment upon Jesus; it was judgment passed once and for all upon this world and its devilish ruler, left behind forever as Christ rises from the tomb.
 4. In the rising of Jesus, we too are lifted up, marked on this Pentecost with tongues of fire. Fire. It's an amazing thing, and it always insists upon having

its own way. If you take a lighted candle, you can move it, hold it, however you'd like. But as long as the flame burns, the flame will do the same thing. It will point upward. No matter how bent or broken the candle, the flame will behave the same, rising straight up. Heavenward, as it were. As the Spirit falls upon us this morning, the fire that emerges within us serves the same purpose, lifting us out of the present, out of sin and death, and pointing us upward. The Spirit lifts us up and in Christ points us to God. And thank God, for as candles we are bent and broken. I remember a chiropractor once pointing out to me how crooked my posture had become. I'd become turned in upon myself and I hadn't even noticed. I was so used to it that I didn't even know. But he straightened me out. So does the Spirit un-crook us – calling, gathering, enlightening, and sanctifying us – pointing us ever toward God, often and even in spite of ourselves.

5. And Lord, does this world need this Spirit. Again this week, we watched in horror as a school shooting unfolded. The saddest thing – beyond the sad, stark truth of these deaths – is that the murders committed at Santa Fe High School in Texas are barely a blip on the radar. The sin of our present reality has made us numb to its power. But today, as the gathered people of God, the Spirit refuses to let us stay turned in upon ourselves, turned away from this world and our neighbor's need. Today, the Spirit is poured out and we are lifted up, pointed toward God and given a new vision, a new dream, of God's future rushing toward us and shaping a new present in which sin and suffering are burned up in love's redeeming fire. Come, Holy Spirit!

6. And the Holy Spirit does come, in the most surprising ways, in the strangest of places. Even to royal weddings. Normally when I talk about the Royals from this pulpit, it's about the bumbling boys from Kansas City. More hapless and less Hapsburg. But yesterday, the Spirit spoke at the wedding of Harry and Meghan through the words of Chicago's own Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. In his stirring sermon, Curry quoted, among

others, the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, noting that “fire was one of the greatest discoveries in all of human history. He then went on to say that if humanity ever harnesses the energy of fire again, if humanity ever captures the energy of love, it will be the second time in history that we have discovered fire.”

7. On this Pentecost Sunday, we do not so much hope to discover the fire of love as we celebrate the truth that the fire of God’s love has discovered us. Jesus has sent us the Spirit from the Father. God’s future runs toward us, rushes at us, even now, with a newly blowing wind. It leaps upon us, grabs hold of us, raise us up and straightens us out. It sets us on fire with flame burning true, moving us out of ourselves and into this world to dream the ancient yet ever-new dream of a resurrection future that triumphs over the groaning pain of the present with the fiery power of love. Christ is risen. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.