

Let's Party!
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When 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 . . . 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 shall see visions, and your old shall dream dreams . . . ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned

to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

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What a story! Today we celebrate the birthday of the church – Pentecost. Fifty days after Passover, Jewish folks from all over the Mediterranean basin had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Shavuot, the giving of the Ten Commandments. Luke tells us that 120 of Jesus' followers were gathered together in one place when suddenly, like a gust of wind, God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, entered the house where they'd gathered and settled like tongues of fire upon their heads. Rational people that you are, you probably assume that next their heads burst into flames, but they didn't! Instead, they started talking to one another in strange languages. The commotion spilled onto the streets and the Jewish pilgrims heard the message of Jesus in their native languages. Some tried to explain the phenomenon by saying that they'd clearly been imbibing spirits, but according to Luke, they'd only had one spirit, the Holy Spirit! Peter launched into a sermon and Luke says that 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus' message. What a birthday story!

I remember one particular birthday when I turned five. I had a clown and she painted my face to look like a tiger. I remember going to a friends' birthday party and we sat around trying to keep still as the birthday boy opened all his presents. I remember a birthday party with a piñata and we all got a little candy and didn't go home completely empty-handed. I remember a lot of birthdays, but nothing like this, nothing like the church's birthday – like Pentecost!

Even so, birthdays were always special when I was a kid. For you too? We celebrated with friends, had special entertainment, clowns or a bouncy house or a piñata, ate cake and ice cream, and opened presents. It was fun. As I grow older though, birthdays are becoming less fun. Have you experienced this too? I have intentionally omitted my birthday from my

Facebook profile and try to avoid mentioning it to others. People who don't plan as intentionally as I did, simply lie about how old they're turning and force a smile at the predictable "surprise" birthday party they're thrown. When we're young, we celebrate all the life we have ahead of us, but as we age, we almost grieve the life behind us.

The truth is, Pentecost is usually kind of like a grown-up's birthday party. It's typically kind of pitiful. We read stories about the spirit showing up in wind and fire, the proclamation of gospel in unknown languages, and the conversion of 3,000 people on the spot. Maybe we remember when churches played a bigger role in communities and society, when our sanctuary was busting with people, or at least fuller, when dozens of eager, perfectly behaved kids filed past us to Sunday School and it makes us sad. It makes us sad that the only fires burn in the candle sticks, the only hot air comes from the minister, and there are more empty seats in the church and fewer people in 21st century America who want to fill them. Like a grown-up's birthday party, Pentecost, in the churches where it's acknowledged or observed, is more of a sad little nod to a vivacious past than a festive celebration of a still life-filled future. I think that for some reason, most churches don't really expect that spirit is gonna show up for the party and, to be honest, I'm not sure that most churches really want the spirit to show up for the party.

You see, for the authors of the New Testament, when spirit shows up, it isn't just to comfort and console, it's to animate and activate the people to be the church, not just in their building, but in the world. When the disciples are hiding out in the upper room after Jesus' crucifixion and Jesus shows up and breathes spirit upon them, they get sent out into the world. In our reading from acts, when Jesus' followers were gathered in that house and spirit showed up in wind and fire, they can't contain it in those four walls and they end up on the street preaching and proclaiming. When spirit shows up, it usually involves getting sent out to share good news in word and in deed, even to people and in places that may not be entirely receptive to the message. The truth is, though, that's what is

supposed to happen when the spirit of Jesus becomes the breath of the church. The church changes the world.

We started the service today with the words, “Come Holy Spirit.” Are you beginning to think that I tricked you into saying that? The truth is, spirit *is* the breath of this place, of this church, of you. Spirit has come in and is still coming and you have gone forth with good news! In the last year, you’ve shared gifts and shoes with local children, sent money and goods to Mutual Ground, volunteered to support the Interfaith Food Pantry, stepped up with funds when disaster or war has struck around the world, begun to confront the history and legacy of racism in our community, equipped the young and the old for ministry through vibrant opportunities of faith nurture, baptized children, celebrated youth, buried ones who’ve died, comforted the living, married the loving, welcomed new members and friends, and responded in myriad other ways as individuals and as a church to the still-active and still-speaking spirit of our faith.

The church is over 2000 years old and this church is over 160 years old, but we did not gather to grieve the life that has already been lived. We gathered to celebrate a still life-filled future! Today is Pentecost, we’re 164 years young and spirit is in this place. Let’s have a party and may it spill out of this place and into our world. Amen.