

May 24, 2015 Pentecost Sunday

As the Spirit reveals, all is renewed

*Texts: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15;
Ezekiel 37:1-14*

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

As the writing team gathered to pray and explore the texts for these Pentecost resources, we experienced the Spirit relating to us even as we related to each other. This experience of “Spirit in relationship” resonated with the themes that emerged from our work. The Spirit is revealed within the context of our relationship with God, in relationships with others, and with all creation.

The Pentecost story of Acts 2 tells of a vast and powerful force that is, at the same time, close and personal (“each one heard them speaking in the native language of each”). Psalm 104 depicts a relationship with a wildly creative God, whereas the passage from Romans refers to an intimacy in our relationship with the Spirit (“sighs too deep for words”).

The texts convey a dynamic tension between different poles: from the universal to the particular, from sorrow to hope, and from expansiveness to closeness. We wondered if these could be woven into a circular knot that helps us experience the presence of God as we celebrate Pentecost. Therefore, the Celtic knot, an ancient Christian symbol of the Trinity, is included to evoke and illustrate this movement from one pole to another, and back again.

The story of Pentecost impresses with its images of fire and smoke. The psalm refers to a God who “touches mountains and they smoke,” and communicates the close relationship of God with the natural world teeming with life and creativity. This creativity is more

than we could ask for or imagine. The fire and the smoke, and the crazy beauty of the natural world, show us something of a God who longs to communicate with us, and seeks to do this in ways we understand. Because of God’s desire for relationship with us, God sends the Spirit to create something new. By this Spirit, the disciples speak in tongues and each person present is able to understand. This worship resource includes images to spark reflection on how the Spirit is revealed uniquely to each of us.

Our expansive, creative God sends forth the Spirit to act as source, guide, and advocate. The image of the Spirit as a mighty wind recalls the life-giving breath that fills our bodies and our lives. Ezekiel says God will “put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” The breath brings both life and knowledge of God. We receive the breath, and we are completely dependent on the breath. This dependence implies our surrender, and it is in surrender that we find the source of life and hope. Our breath reminds us that the Spirit is close at all times. When we try to control our breathing, it does not flow in a natural way, but when we surrender or relax into the breath, we are able to experience intimacy with the Spirit. In this atmosphere of profound closeness “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.”

The Spirit’s sighs, which are too deep for words, may arise from our deepest longings or despair. It is in these places of lost hopes, our “dry bones,” that the

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worship materials in this section.

Spirit may emerge, an important part of the circular rhythm of our spiritual lives. All of us have places in life, whether personal or relational, where we feel such disconnect and despair. We do well to tune in and allow ourselves to “be” in these places of lost hope or dry bones.

One wonders about the emotions present in the disciples who gathered on the first Pentecost. The text tells us they gathered regularly and tended to one another. In the days after Christ ascended, had they lost their hope and sense of purpose? Did they tune in to one another’s deep and difficult emotions, each other’s longings for renewal? As we contemplate and celebrate Pentecost, will we?

It is from the soil of our longing for renewal that the reciprocal and circular work of God emerges. We surrender to God who created the entire natural world and at the same time exists in close relationship with each part. The psalmist says that even the creatures of the earth feel dismay when God’s face is hidden. This speaks of a life-giving and relationship-maintaining God who seeks to communicate closely with all that has been created. In this reciprocal relationship, we receive the promise that God will “renew the face of the earth” and restore us to our own soil, a promise made by the prophet Ezekiel, to a people who had lost hope.

Our intimacy with the Spirit allows us to be fully known and fully restored. May participants in this Pentecost service experience this as an invitation to acknowledge their own spiritual rhythm and to reconnect with the Spirit. Only when we are fully known and fully home are we free to creatively express and celebrate the renewing work of the Spirit.

A FLEXIBLE ORDER OF SERVICE

VISUALS

Look for photos that relate to the Spirit’s work in all of creation. You may want to invite photo submissions from your congregation ahead of time, for this Sunday. These images may be used for quiet reflection before or after the service, with or without the questions provided. Or, several photos may be integrated into the service with guiding questions. We have collected a number of images in the following categories to help spark your own ideas, or you may use our collection for your service.

A *Leader* subscriber may download these documents at www.leaderonline.org. Click on the desired quarter, enter the username *Easter15* and the password (*rhe7534*). They are both case sensitive.

[www.leaderonline.org; permission for use is granted for materials not listed as in the public domain]

- God’s intricate designs
- God in relation
- Hope in dry places
- Spirit in the everyday
- Spirit—source of vibrant life
- Spirit/Wind/Fire
- The spirit that restores

Guiding Questions for the visuals:

- What is your eye drawn to in this photograph? Where do you notice the influence of a Creator?
- Pay attention to the patterns/beauty/detail in the photo. Consider the connection between yourself, the created world, and our Creator God.
- Where do you notice life and vibrancy in this photo? Acknowledge and thank God—the source of life.
- Take inventory of the various parts of this photo. Where is God’s Spirit in the ordinary acts of the day?

MUSIC

The music for this resource comes from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, *Sing the Story*, *Sing the Journey*, and contemporary sources. Consider these as suggestions and feel free to be selective and creative in selecting the music that best fits your worship setting.

- HWB* 26 “Holy Spirit, Come with Power”
- HWB* 31 “Wind Who Makes All Winds”
- HWB* 356 “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”
- HWB* 482 “Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth”
- HWB* 559 “O Thou, in Whose Presence”
- HWB* 614 “In the Bulb There Is a Flower”
- STS* 79 “Holy Spirit, Come to Us”
- STS* 104 “Come, O Spirit, Come”
- STJ* 6 “Jesu Tawa Pano” (Jesus, We Are Here)
option: replace Jesu/Jesus with Spirit, Fire of life, or Breath of God
- STJ* 10 “Spirit, Working in Creation”
- STJ* 12 “Cantai ao Senhor” (O Sing to the Lord)
- STJ* 16 “Praise with Joy the World’s Creator”
“You Gotta Sing” Bryan Moyer Suderman

<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/you-gotta-sing-when-spirit/id343492301?i=343492304>

- “Catch the Spirit” Bryan Moyer Suderman
<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/catch-the-spirit/id468975099?i=468975110>
- “How Do You Know?” Bryan Moyer Suderman
<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/how-do-you-know/id338934088?i=338935038>
- “Your Grace Finds Me” Matt Redman
<http://www.metrolyrics.com/your-grace-finds-me-lyrics-matt-redman>
- “Movements” Rend Collective Experiment
<http://www.songlyrics.com/rend-collective-experiment/movements-lyrics>
- “Full Force Gale” Van Morrison
<http://www.metrolyrics.com/full-force-gale-lyrics-van-morrison>

CALL TO WORSHIP

If languages other than English are known or used in your congregational context, translate this simple call to worship to be read in as many languages as applicable. Follow the call to worship with a joyful reading of Psalm 104:24-34, 35b.

God's Spirit . . .

the beginning of life

the fullness of life

the source of life

our guide in life

As the Spirit reveals, all is renewed.

Read: Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

SCRIPTURE MEDLEY—A RETELLING OF THE PENTECOST SCRIPTURES

This medley incorporates aspects of all of the lectionary readings. It is meant to evoke a sense of wonder at the way in which past, present, and future expressions of the Spirit intersect through expressive reading by three readers. It should be read at a contemplative pace. It could be read from different parts of the sanctuary to give a sense of movement and a filling of the space.

Consider inviting the children to children's time by singing the refrain of “Let the Children Come to Me” (*STS* 47). This sets a beautiful tone for allowing them to enter into this prayer time as they are able, and helps remind the congregation that perfect prayer performance matters far less than availability to God.

Reader instructions: Take sufficient time to breathe between statements, enabling a speaking pace that is

unhurried and invites the deeper meaning of the words to settle in the listeners' hearts, beyond their heads.

Reader 1: Waiting. Wondering. Praying.

Reader 2: *Together, pondering the words that Jesus left them;
 an Advocate Spirit promised;
 guiding into truth;
 declaring things that are to come.*

Reader 1: Waiting. Wondering. Praying.
 Together in one place.

Reader 2: *Suddenly, the sound of wind;
 rushing, violent wind filling the space between them.
 Suddenly, mysterious fire,
 transforming Galilean tongues into foreign languages.*

Reader 1: Amazed, astonished listeners hearing in their own native languages the telling of God's deeds of power. Some wonder, “What does this mean?” Others sneer, “They are filled with new wine.”

Reader 3: *Do you hear the groaning?
 The birth pains of all creation?
 Waiting. Hoping. Longing for redemption.
 Do you hear, in your own language,
 the expression of your soul's deepest sighs?
 Do you feel the breath of new life?
 Breathed into bones we didn't know could live again?
 Do you recall the prophecies of old? To receive the Spirit within, and to live, at home, on our own soil?*

Reader 1: Amazed. Astonished. Remembering promises.

Reader 2: *Spirit poured out upon all flesh;
 sons and daughters prophesying;
 young and old men seeing visions,
 dreaming dreams.
 Spirit poured out on even the unlikely ones;
 and they too shall prophesy;
 Unexpected and unusual signs point to hope.*

Reader 1: That everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

SERMON STARTER

The record of Pentecost in Acts shows the surprising entrance of the Holy Spirit. The revealing of tongues and supernatural signs was surely not what the gathered followers of Jesus expected. Yet their posture of prayer and community seems to have set the stage for them to connect their experience with the well-known prophecy in Joel, and the words with which Jesus had left them. All the Pentecost texts speak to the ongoing, creative movement of the Spirit leading to renewal.

In the Ezekiel passage, the breath of the Spirit invites the prophet into the process of bringing life to impossibly dry bones; in the psalm, the renewal of creation is celebrated as the fruit of the Spirit's creativity, with the emphasis on verse 30, "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground." The John text shows Jesus hinting at his interrelatedness with the Spirit and the Father—words the disciples would begin to grasp in hindsight. The passage from Romans shows the invitation for us to rely on the Spirit, in the midst of the groans for redemption evident all around us.

Each text offers invitations to a deeper spiritual life. The Spirit cannot be boxed in or pinned down, yet offers us a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. Together with the creative Spirit we move through times of longing, waiting, hoping, recognizing, and renewal in both our personal and collective journeys.

PRAYER LITANY AND EXAMEN

This prayer litany reflects the following movement within the lectionary Scriptures for this Pentecost Sunday:

- Longing and despair
- Noticing and being drawn into Spirit movement
- Celebrating Spirit movement
- Responding with creativity and love

Embedded in the litany are questions which provide opportunity for prayerful reflection, inviting us to detect God's presence in our daily lives and to discern the Spirit's guidance. Following each question, leaders are encouraged to allow for one to two minutes of silent reflection. A singing bowl, chime, or bell may be used to mark the end of the silent time and invite the community back into the refrain.

Leader: Spirit of God . . .

*All: You are the beginning of life
the fullness of life
the source of life*

*our guide in life
As you reveal, all is renewed.*

Leader: We bring to you our moments of weakness, despair, broken relationship, and lost hope. We acknowledge our longings to be seen, to be known, and to experience connection. *(Pause)*

Let us now recall times and places in the past week or months when we have felt stretched beyond our limits or disconnected with those closest to us. When have we ached for the Spirit to speak on our behalf?

Silence (each silence concludes with a chime, etc.)

Leader: Spirit of God . . .

*All: You are the beginning of life
the fullness of life
the source of life
our guide in life
As you reveal, all is renewed.*

Leader: At times we see you all around us, In our lives, in each other, in creation teeming with your abundance. Other times we long to catch just a glimpse of your mystery, we wait, and we wonder. *(Pause)*

What images come to mind in nature around us and in our experience: springtime rebirth, winter dormancy, times of waiting, imminent transformation, abundant growth . . . ?

Silence

Leader: Spirit of God . . .

*All: You are the beginning of life
the fullness of life
the source of life
our guide in life
As you reveal, all is renewed.*

Leader: Come to us in our distraction and our sorrow, in our strength and our joy. Draw us into your restoring and transforming ways. *(Pause)*

Let us consider the ways that God's Spirit is even now creating, transforming, and moving within

and around us. Where have we noticed the Spirit providing hope and renewal? In our hearts, our families, our communities?

Silence

Leader: Spirit of God . . .

*All: You are the beginning of life
the fullness of life
the source of life
our guide in life
As you reveal, all is renewed.*

Leader: Ignite us, Burning Flame . . .

Fill us, Breath of Life . . .

We welcome and celebrate your movement in our lives.

May we embody your creativity and love. (*Pause*)

Let us take a moment to listen . . .

Where are we feeling the Spirit's nudges toward creativity, toward restored relationship? In what practical ways might we embody hope and love for someone this week?

Silence

Leader: Spirit of God . . .

*All: You are the beginning of life
the fullness of life
the source of life
our guide in life
As you reveal, all is renewed.*

INTERGENERATIONAL OR CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

Intergenerational Activity (option 1) (Allow five to 10 minutes for this activity)

Our reading from Psalm 104 highlights God's incredible creativity as seen in the world around us. God brings shape and life to the natural world—with the seemingly endless variety of creatures, the seed-bearing plants and trees that recreate themselves, the intricate patterns and the balance of life's cycles. This activity offers a way for your congregation to participate in God's creativity by inviting God's Spirit to continually create and bring life to us. It is intended to create interaction between generations and between people who may not normally find themselves in a group together. If you have not tried an

intergenerational activity in your worship time—here are some reasons why you may want to consider it:

- Sharing experiences across generations brings new connections, creating a greater sense of community.
- When we exercise our creativity together, we follow our Creator's lead, giving us another avenue to "know" God.
- Working on a task together opens us up in a different way, perhaps bringing a new perspective to a familiar Sunday morning ritual.

Instructions for leader:

Supplies needed: a quantity of pipe cleaners.

Begin the process of forming groups by handing out small bundles of five to 10 pipe cleaners to the children and youth of your congregation. Invite each adult in the congregation to pair up with one or more young people. Each group should consist of two or three people. You may need to have some extra bundles of pipe cleaners on hand depending on your ratio of children to adults.

Encourage the groups to let their imaginations run free—dreaming up an object or creative design and then forming it with the pipe cleaners they've been given. If you think your congregation may need some inspiration, choose some ideas from the list below. These prompts may be displayed on the screen or given verbally:

- braid the pipe cleaners, while reflecting on the three persons of God
- gather ideas from the Scriptures read this morning or other biblical images of the Spirit (i.e. pipe cleaner people [Ezekiel], three-dimensional flames [Acts] or create your own symbol for the Spirit interceding [Romans])
- use a template to create a Celtic knot—the following image could be used as a bulletin insert <http://sweetclipart.com/triquetra-symbol-line-art-2118> (public domain image)

Wrap up this time by allowing groups to share their work with each other. Those who are interested can bring their objects to an area at the front of the worship space for display. A song may be played during the last couple of minutes of the activity to signal the closing.

Children's Time (option 2) (Icosahedron: object lesson looking at the multifaceted nature of God and Spirit)

Sometimes it can be helpful to explore the mystery of God in our lives through symbols and images.

Ahead of time:

Follow the instructions on the following website to create a large (18x18-in / 45x45 cm) three-dimensional paper shape, called an icosahedron: <http://spoonful.com/crafts/paper-plate-polyhedron>.

Supplies needed: 20 thin paper plates (plus one extra plate for display), stapler, markers

Print some of the roles of God's Spirit on the paper plates (one word per plate): *for example, guiding, helping, revealing, giving life, renewing, creating, interceding, translating, communicating, giving power, surprising, comforting, inviting . . .*

Staple the plates together according to the instructions.

You may have some other words you want to include on the shape. It is all right to leave some of the plates blank, to represent those places where God is at work, even though we can't name or fully understand them.

Gather the children at the front of the church. Place the icosahedron in a location where it is visible to both the children and congregation ahead of time. If possible, suspend it from the ceiling with some string. Place the single, extra plate with three folds nearby, to show separately.

Children's Time text:

Leader:

Today is a special day for the church. Does anyone know the name we use for this Sunday, or what it is that we are celebrating?

It is Pentecost Sunday.

Before Jesus left the earth and returned to God, he explained to the disciples that God would be sending the Spirit. The disciples were sad that they would not see Jesus on earth anymore, but Jesus promised that the Spirit would always be with them. On Pentecost, we celebrate the day when God's Spirit came to Jesus' followers, giving them the ability to speak in different languages and sending them out to share what they knew of God with the rest of the world.

Hold up the single plate—point to the three tips of the triangle, explaining that these points can represent the three persons of God: God the Father, Jesus (God's Son), and the Holy Spirit.

You can see by looking at the circle (trace finger around edge of plate) that although there are three parts to God—they are one.

Invite the children to consider the many parts of the icosahedron. Hold up the single plate again and explain that the shape is made up of 20 individual paper plates.

The shape is large and has many sides. We cannot always see or understand all of the ways that God is with us, but the story of Pentecost reminds us that God wants to connect with us. I have written some words on the sides to remind us of the many ways that God's Spirit is with us and is connecting with us every day.

Draw attention to the words on the plate, reading out some of the roles that the Spirit has in our lives and giving concrete examples to illustrate. For example:

Communicating: God speaks to us in many different ways—sometimes it is through a friend telling us that they love us.

Renewing: When we've had a hard day, God gives us a fresh start.

Leave the icosahedron at the front of the church as a reminder of God's multifaceted and expansive nature.

We thank you God, for giving us a way to connect with you all the time, through your Spirit.

Amen.

BENEDICTION/SENDING

As we go with God's Spirit,

we begin anew

we are filled again

we are guided on our way

we are restored to life

By the power of the Spirit we celebrate our renewal.



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