

5.24.2026 Day of Pentecost

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 20:10-23

“So I send you”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Though Pentecost is one of the three major church festivals, unlike Christmas and Easter, Pentecost has never been commercialized – and for good reason – it is impossible to market and to control the Holy Spirit! On Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit who continues to gather, lead, and speak through the church.

In the Book of Acts, Jesus links the Holy Spirit to the sending of the church into the world, saying, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

The words, “*you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth,*” remind me of a book inscription received from a fellow missionary, named Dr. Ken Dale, that reads, “Brought together by the waves of history and the mystery of the divine will.” This is what the Holy Spirit does: the Spirit brings people together by the waves of history so that we might, in the mystery of God’s will, work together as Christ’s body, the church.

Each of you here today have been brought together on the waves of history so that as the church we might witness to Christ in this city, in this nation, and to the ends of the earth! Pentecost celebrates God’s ongoing mission in the church.

I have two questions for you to ponder today: “What are the waves of history by which the Holy Spirit has led you in your life, and how is Christ using you today to be a sign of peace and forgiveness?”

Today we heard the Pentecost text (Acts 2) read in several languages by members of this congregation. In addition, parts of today’s service will also be read in another language. These languages remind us that God speaks through people and cultures. This is as Peter declared on Pentecost, “*Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” God is still speaking, and the Holy Spirit is still inspiring humanity to call upon the name of the Lord.

The mystery of the divine will moves in the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “*no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit,*” reminding us that the Holy Spirit blows where it wills, giving us power to call upon God and to name Jesus as “Lord.” The Spirit moves over the waters of baptism and by the waves of history, un beholden to worldly powers or agendas. The confession, “*Jesus is Lord*” continues to be a revolutionary act today, just as it was in the Roman world, where the confession, “Caesar is Lord” was demanded of all people. Caesar demanded fealty from his subjects, and the confession “*Jesus is Lord*” was a treasonable offense. Throughout history down to the present, leaders have demanded fealty, while

Christians have continued to declare the lordship of Christ. God's Spirit moves on the waves of history and will judge us by our actions as well as our neglect to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

One of the oldest symbols of the church is that of a ship sailing across the waves of the world. Indeed, the word that describes the main section of our church sanctuary – the nave – has its origin in the Latin word, *navis*, meaning “ship.” Looking from the nave toward the altar, the visible wooden beams of the chancel ceiling are shaped like the keel of a ship, reminding us that the church carries us on our spiritual journey into the mystery of God.

Yet the waves of history have also carried many other ships – ships of war and the ships of empire that brought colonialism and the enslavement of peoples. Today, as we give thanks for the church, we also confess our complicity in the waves of history that colonized and annexed nations, and that put a price upon human beings. To confess “*Jesus is Lord*” also demands that we confess our ongoing sin of placing other lords above Christ in our lives.

As we give thanks for the gift of the Spirit, we also must confess that as the church we have not always spoken out against the world when governments and ideologies have oppressed the poor and the hungry and mistreated the foreigner and stranger. The world continues to misunderstand Christ's church, even today, as it persecutes the messengers of the gospel for speaking the message of Jesus' suffering love and peace to a broken and sinful world.

On Pentecost we also describe the church as one body with many members, writing, “*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews and Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*” Like the Ark of Noah that carried the diversity of the world, animals and people, amid the storm, the church of today continues to carry and offer sanctuary to all who call upon the Lord amid the world's storms.

On Pentecost Jesus describes the shape of the church's work, saying, “*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*” These words define who we are as Christ's body the church. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon his disciples commissioning them, and us, to bring peace and forgiveness to the world. Jesus also gives the church the work of reconciliation, saying, “*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” To be a Christian is to be sent out in God's mission of peace and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.

The work of forgiveness also means naming the sins that continue to divide us so that we might work toward reconciliation. The breadth of God's love and mercy forgives all who call upon the name of the Lord, yet the church is also called to retain the sins of a sinful and self-serving world and its systems of power – a world that wages war rather than seeking peace, a world that condemns the weak, the stranger, and enemies rather than showing mercy and working toward reconciliation. The audacity of Jesus' gospel continues to anger a world that

seeks retribution rather than peace, a world that looks down upon the gospel of love as “make-believe” and “unrealistic.” The world ignores the transformative power of divine reconciliation that makes friends of enemies and family of strangers.

Yet it is to this mission of peace and reconciliation that Jesus sends his church, saying, “*As the father has sent me, so I send you.*” The Father sends Jesus into the world as the suffering servant who offers peace and reconciliation, gathering the weak and the poor, and calling the proud and the powerful to new lives of humility and service for others. Jesus and his church always stand between oppressor and the oppressed calling for reconciliation. On Pentecost we hear anew the words, “*So I send you.*” Jesus sends us not to destroy but to lift and to heal this fallen world.

Some years ago, I belonged to the Japan Ecumenical Association, and I remember a talk given by the late Bishop Kazuhiro Mori, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tokyo. Late one summer afternoon, Bishop Mori, dressed casually in a clerical shirt with sleeves rolled-up, addressed the association, speaking about why the church is always in need of Holy Spirit’s reformation. The bishop recounted being a young priest in Rome and of seeing the Bishop of Rome carried into St. Peter’s Basilica on a chair of gilded gold. At this sight, the young priest, not knowing he would one day become bishop, recounted that he said to himself, “I never want to be carried like that. Christians are called to imitate Jesus by lifting and carrying others.”

When Jesus says, “*So I send you,*” he is sending you out upon the waves of history as his witnesses of peace and reconciliation. Today’s gathering hymn, “God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind (ELW #400), says it well:

God of tempest, God of whirlwind, as on Pentecost descend!
Drive us out from sheltered comfort; past these walls your people send!
Sweep us into costly service, there with Christ to bear the cross,
there with Christ to bear the cross!

Again, I ask,

What are the waves of history by which the Holy Spirit has led you?

How is Christ using you today to be a sign of peace and forgiveness to a broken world?

Amen.