SERMON NOTES **May 31, 2020**

WE ARE……
Acts 2:1-21
Don Lincoln

Each day this past week on Facebook, Lynn George, our Director of Communications, has been posting the picture and plans of a graduating high school senior from the congregation. It's been a fabulous way to celebrate our students, and to learn how their next chapter is going to start.

Among those announcing plans to attend college was at least one who mentioned "Penn State." And, as you might imagine – one of the first Facebook comments on the posting was a very simple one – a word of congratulations, accompanied by this:

And from there came the title of today's sermon: "WE ARE……" And for once I'm glad there's no one in the room this morning, for I'm certain someone would've immediately shouted out PENN STATE!

On this high holy day of Pentecost, often called the birthday of the church, the only way to finish the phrase, "WE ARE….." is to say: "THE CHURCH!" We don't GO to church – we ARE the church!

In our text, the apostles and other believers were huddled together, anxiously awaiting the coming of the promised Spirit. Then the Spirit came – and **the church was born**. WE ARE – THE CHURCH!

But here's the key. The gift of the spirit came not for their sake, or for the sake of the church. The Spirit came for the sake of the world. The profusion of language right here at the start denotes this significance. This event is universal and boundless, not provincial or limited. By their being named – many – perhaps even all – nations were

being addressed. AND note – Pentecost does not reunite all languages and cultures into one. It enables diversity to be witnessed and celebrated, as EVERY person from every nation understood the Good News being preached.[1]

Peter's quote from the prophet Joel is remarkably inclusive: sons and daughters, young and old men, male and female slaves. ALL of them receive God's Spirit.

In fact – that's where I was going with this sermon – reflecting on the desire to open up church buildings – and my hope that when we are able to worship in-person again, it will be fully inclusive, when every member and friend could come back safely.

As the prophet Joel says, "Young daughters and sons – think children in childcare – old men (like me) – young and old together, male and female, even the vulnerable – whether in mind, body or spirit. We've never asked people to self-select their worship attendance by age or infirmity. Why would we begin doing so now? That was the direction this sermon was headed.

Then a video arrived Thursday from Work of the People[2] – a source of liturgical videos we have used. In fact it was where we found the video used as the pastoral prayer a number of weeks ago that so many of you commented on and asked for a link so that you could watch it again. Well – they sent us a video on Thursday. The pastoral staff watched it, then debated together whether or not to use it in worship today – back and forth we went. As one said, "The video is loud, and fiery, and fierce." First I said, "Yes." Then I said "No." But Friday morning God's Spirit nudged me, and so, watch this: https://bit.ly/2UuZ0qC

Come, Great Spirit! By Chris Neufeld-Erdman
(text of video)

Holy Spirit, Presence of God
Holy Breath, Life Divine
Holy Wind, Mover and Shaker!
We throw open our hearts before you; we cast down every barrier to your freedom; we yield to your boundless nature; we welcome your wildness. Too long have we tried to tame the wind; too long have we sought to control what's wild; too long have we stood in domination over the earth.

At this moment of earth's great groaning, yearning, as if in labor, to birth what's holy and enduring, come, breathe, blow, move upon us all – that earth and all that's in it may thrive; that earth and all that's in it may love; that earth and all that's in it may live in the harmony and wholeness you desire for us and all creation!

Come, Great Spirit!
Breathe, blow, move upon us! Here! Now!
Come, Great Spirit!
Here now, may it be so!

You see, how the spirit nudged me on Friday morning, was that I received an email from my pastor's group friend, Tim Hart-Andersen. Tim is the pastor of one of the 10 largest Presbyterian churches in the country. It is THE largest Presbyterian congregation named WESTMINSTER. It's location? Downtown Minneapolis. Here are Tim's words:

"Our city has been wracked this week with **fire and noise and chaos**, following the brutal killing of George Floyd by a police officer on Monday. Heartbreak and sorrow for the Floyd family and friends have combined with rage and boiled over into violent protest at yet another death of an unarmed black man at the hands of law enforcement.

Sunday is Pentecost. In Acts 2, when people from across the world were gathered in Jerusalem, a mighty wind began blowing among them. With that wind also came **fire and noise and chaos**.....but out of the turmoil something remarkable happened. People began hearing others speak in their own languages, and yet they understood one another. **And from that we can have hope**."[3] They understood one another; and from that we can have hope.

Listen again to the prophet Joel: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." "Our nation needs a new vision. We need to not only dream dreams but do the hard work for the day when racial violence and injustice cease and our communities finally learn to live in harmony."

Before the violence and destruction of the last couple nights across the country, do you recall what the fighting was that was on the news? There were church leaders actually fighting – even filing lawsuits – about their right to gather – as if religious freedom trumps the right to keep my neighbor safe.

Which is interesting, because almost every congregation I know has seen a HUGE rise in worship attendance during this pandemic. Our attendance has at times here at Westminster been triple our average Sunday morning worship attendance when we are in the building. As I've said before, church is open; ministry is happening. We even had 15 new members join today! Thanks be to God!!

I am honestly not worried about being back together for in-person worship. I am absolutely certain we will be back together in our building one day. It may be a while before it's safe for ALL of us to attend. But it will happen. I honestly believe there will be a vaccine, and we'll be done with all this.

But today my heart cries out to God – if only there were a vaccine for systemic racism. **But there is.** Come, Holy Spirit, Come. Breathe on us. Breathe on this broken world. Speak truth to us all. Convict us. Teach us the power of honesty, repentance for our own complicity in unjust systems, and forgiveness and grace and love, lest anger, violence and vengeance threaten to devour us all. Come Holy Spirit, open us up that we might be remade into vessels for God's love and reconciliation.

I began this sermon speaking about our graduating students. It's growing more evident to me that it's not going to be old men like me who are dreaming the dreams. It's the young who are most convicted about the world being different than it is – a world of justice, of racial peace, of harmony among all God's children.

Sisters and brothers**, WE ARE……the church**. May the Spirit start with us; mold us; make us; shake us; do a fiery work necessary among us, so that we might be transformed, so that our own, changed selves might then be a message of love and hope that – we – each and every one of us – believe with all of our heart and will work for a world where all people of every creed and color can live decent, healthy lives, free from oppression; free from fear.

Come, Holy Spirit. Come!

May it be so. AMEN

1. L. Shannon Jung, *Connections Commentary*, Year A, Volume 2; Acts 2: 1-218
2. www.workofthepeople.com; "Come, Great Spirit" video.
3. Tim Hart-Andersen, Email to Westminster Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis, MN; Friday May 29, 2020