



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Pentecost Sunday, May 31, 2020

Waves of Despair, Tongues of Fire: A Pentecost Message from the World Council of Churches Presidents

Acts 2:1-21

2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

2:2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

2:3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

2:6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

2:7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

2:8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

2:9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

2:11 Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

2:12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

2:13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

2:14 But 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.

2:15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

2:16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

2:17 '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 men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

2:18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

2:19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

2:20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

2:21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. (Acts 2:2-4)

Last month, Pentecost Island was among those islands in Vanuatu, in the Southeast Pacific, that were most pummeled by Cyclone Harold, a Category 5 hurricane with winds of 165 mph and "king tides" of 20 feet and more. Devastating and lethal, the cyclone ripped roofs away, leveled structures, flooded communities, and took lives.

When the fierce storm hit her island home, Moana, owner of a beach resort, woke in fear for her life and her property. For two hours, she stood facing the winds and waves, imploring God to save herself and her property. Fortunately, when the storm had passed, Moana was still standing and her buildings were still intact.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the advent of the Spirit is portrayed in similarly dramatic and consequential ways. The earliest followers of Jesus, hiding in fear, were shaken, and then emboldened by the mighty presence of God, allowing them to overcome even barriers of language and culture to preach the saving message of Jesus' resurrection. The church was born in tumult yet emerged from the chaos with a potent, indeed life-changing, message relevant to all cultures and contexts.

As at the first Pentecost, so it must be again today.

Now, as we write, a silent, invisible, yet even more lethal natural force has landed. The novel coronavirus has upended the whole world, instilling terror and chaos, causing millions to fall ill

and hundreds of thousands to die. The pandemic has wreaked havoc on economies, upset families and community life, eluded the most sophisticated systems of global and local healthcare, tested the mettle and efficacy of governance, and caused outbreaks of hunger.

Yet this Pentecost, across the centuries and around the world, we Christians are linked to each other and to those earliest disciples to proclaim, as they boldly did, that the God of Life is with us still. The Spirit of God lifts our hearts in prayer and longing. The Spirit instills in us courage to face grief and suffering. The Spirit enflames our hearts with love to serve those who suffer and are excluded from society's systems of care. The Spirit illumines our minds to engage in and support intense scientific research for treatments and vaccines. The Spirit enables us to confront and surmount this virus with generous cooperation, with our best medical and pastoral care, and, above all, with loving kindness toward all God's children.

The Spirit of God, too, is *pan-demos*. It touches all people and crosses all barriers, yet in a way that spells life, not death. This Pentecost, we pray, may wrestling with this pandemic unleash the Spirit's energies in the whole people of God and renew, not just the church, but the face of the earth.

The presidents of the World Council of Churches:

- *Rev. Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (passed away May 19, 2020)*
- *Rev. Prof. Dr Sang Chang, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea*
- *Archbishop em Anders Wejryd, Church of Sweden*
- *Rev. Gloria Nohemy Ulloa Alvarado, Presbyterian Church in Colombia*
- *Bishop Mark MacDonald, Anglican Church of Canada*
- *Rev. Dr Mele'ana Puloka, Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga*
- *H.B. John X, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*
- *H.H. Karekin II, the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians*

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share/write down— When have you seen the Holy Spirit breaking down human divisions? Have you been able to form connections across deep divides? If so, when and how? How does focusing on something bigger than ourselves make it possible to overcome such divisions?

Read or recite the Apostle's Creed, our Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

PRAY: Make us one, Lord. Make us one. Holy Spirit, make us one. Let your love flow so the world will know we are one in You. AMEN

ACT:

1. Take some time to learn something about someone different from you (maybe read about a different culture, learn a phrase of greeting in a different language, research a different political or cultural perspective)
2. See also the craft activity that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Spirit of the Living God
AMEC Hymnal, #619

Spir-it of the Liv-ing God,
Fall fresh on me,
Spir-it of the Liv-ing God,
Fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, Fill me, use me,
Spir-it of the Liv-ing God, Fall fresh on me.

Alternative Song:

Holy Spirit, <https://youtu.be/kZAj-l6XXI>
By New Jersey Mass Choir

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric (maybe red for Pentecost) to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



Title: Pentecost

Notes: JESUS MAFA is a response to the New Testament readings from the Lectionary by a Christian community in Cameroon, Africa. Each of the readings was selected and adapted to dramatic interpretation by the community members. Photographs of their interpretations were made, and these were then transcribed to paintings. Date: 1973

The exuberant expression of joy in this depiction represents the Acts story, including Mary and the women mentioned in Acts, Chapter 1. Pentecost was originally an ancient Hebrew time of thanksgiving celebration for the first grain harvest, as recorded in Leviticus. The new significance given to this day by the gospel writers and early Christians extends that joyful expression to the new "filling up" by the Holy Spirit.

The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.