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*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA*

*Pentecost*

*May 23, 2021*

*Acts 2:1-21; Ps. 104:24-34,35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15*

Next Sunday many of us won't be watching worship from home sitting on our couches or our desk chairs or at our dining room table. We'll be sitting outside on the other side of this sanctuary wall on our labyrinth for our first worship service in person in over 14 months.

I waver between bubbling over with joy at the thought of gathering with you for worship and shuddering with nervousness. Not because we won't be safe doing so—we are truly taking every precaution to create the very safest environment for in-person worship, that's why we'll be worshipping outside. But I'm nervous that it will feel awkward, that I won't know how to interact with you since we won't be sharing hugs or handshakes, that I won't have a delete button to redo any part of the worship service that I've messed up on like I've done every single Sunday I've filmed worship for our online service.

But you know the thing that really makes me nervous worshipping in person outside? The weather. We'll have canopies that will protect us from sun and rain, but I'm really nervous that some Sunday morning we'll get one of those massive winds that will blow bulletins and hair and music and will just feel uncomfortable. A gust of wind could push us out of our comfort zones, literally.

I wonder if the rush of a violent wind that filled the house where some of Christ's first followers were gathered as we heard in the book of Acts today was equally as uncomfortable. I am certain it was not something they were used to, and it pushed them beyond what they had ever experienced before. You see, that wind was the Holy Spirit rushing into each of them and causing them to speak in languages they had never spoken before – to go outside their comfort zones – to experience something that was so new to them that some of the devout Jews who heard them even thought they were drunk!

It is so fascinating to me that at the very moment that the Christian church was inaugurated the wind of the Holy Spirit was pushing Christ's followers outside of their comfort zones, beyond the boundaries of what they had previously known and experienced, in order to speak of God's deeds of power so that everyone of every language and culture might be welcomed into God's kin-dom. The Holy Spirit moved in the hearts and minds of Christ's followers so that, as Peter said, ALL flesh—young and old, men and women, sons and daughters, even slaves—would receive the Holy Spirit and prophesy to God's deeds of power.

From the very beginning moments of the church the wind of the Holy Spirit was moving the church beyond what had been previously known and understood—moving Christ's followers beyond their comfort zones—to include all flesh—those of every language and culture and age and gender and class—into the realm of the church. The Holy Spirit was insisting that no matter who they were, everyone belonged in the church. Everyone had a voice in the church. Everyone who called on the name of the Lord, as Peter said, would be saved.

I'm going to take a risk right now and guess that some of you who have been watching our worship services during our Easter season may have felt pushed beyond your comfort zone during our Diversity,

Equity, and Inclusion Corners. You might wonder why we have been exploring these topics during Sunday worship and adult education classes on Wednesday evenings. It might not seem to you like these topics belong in the church, belong in worship.

Perhaps how you interpret scripture—your hermeneutic—or just your lack of previous exposure to these topics causes you discomfort. And today you watched the video about Reconciling in Christ and you might know that many in our congregation would like our church to make a more intentional statement of welcome for those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or otherwise, and to commit more strongly to a journey of anti-racism.

This might be well beyond your comfort zone. And if that is the case, I invite you today to ponder something. Might the Holy Spirit be pushing each of us, no matter our level of discomfort, beyond our comfort zones to reveal to us a truth that we have not experienced before. As Jesus said, after he went away he would send the Spirit that would guide us into all the truth. Is it the truth that all flesh has received the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit does not discriminate based on race or class or gender or sexuality, and so neither should we.

Certainly we know from Peter that salvation is not based on any of those things for as Peter proclaimed to all who were gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost—everyone, *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And we hear from Paul in Galatians that neither Jew nor Greek nor slave nor free nor male or female are more important or worthy than another, since all are one in Christ Jesus.

Might it be that the wind of the Holy Spirit is pushing us outside our comfort zones to a greater welcome, a deeper understanding of what it means that all flesh is saved.

I know that we might not understand this. I know that we might not even know how to pray about this. But again, the gift of the Holy Spirit helps us. For likewise, Paul says in Romans, 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.

When we're sitting outside in the labyrinth and memorial garden area starting next Sunday and a rush of a violent wind comes up—not if but when—perhaps it can remind us that the Holy Spirit blew over that first Christian church to push them outside their comfort zone in order that all of God's people would be equally welcome in the church. And maybe, when a gust of wind literally pushes us out of our comfort zones and our hair and bulletins and music are fluttering in the wind, the Spirit is doing the same for our church today. Amen.