

Day of Pentecost, June 8, 2025

Sermon by the Rev. Joshua Wong at St. Michaels Church

Epistle: Acts 2:1-21

*Let us pray: “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” Amen.*

Happy Pentecost! This IS a joyous day to celebrate, so join us for coffee hour later.

The Feast of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, Mary, and the other first followers of Jesus while they were in the upper room where the Last Supper took place.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised to send his disciples an advocate, the Holy Spirit, to give them understanding and direction. Pentecost was the fulfillment of that promise, making it one of the most important feast days of the year. It celebrates God’s promise of his continual presence and the start of the mission of the church to the world.

The Holy Spirit also gave the apostles the gifts necessary to preach the gospel. Jesus had given them instructions to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” At the first Pentecost, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preached his first sermon, explaining how the prophet Joel had foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit. After this sermon, Peter, who is considered the first pope, converted three thousand people. For this reason, Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church. That is why in the declaration of the Nicene Creed we say, “we believe in one catholic and apostolic Church. Apostolic referring to the Apostolic succession of the church. Also, for those who recently took catechism, you may recall that the word catholic which is not capitalized, means in Greek “universal,” or “worldwide,” not to be confused with an upper case “C” which refers specifically to the Catholic Church.

Nothing in the Pentecost story was subtle and passive, instead, the Spirit was bold, penetrating and strengthening the early Christian community. The Acts passage that Keiichi just read in Japanese is the biblical account of the first Pentecost. It recalls that when the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. The 12 Apostles saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were

filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Notice that the language they spoke was not their mother tongue, therefore it was a global event. We see that the Spirit during Pentecost does not reveal uniformity, but the miracle revealed unity in diversity and understanding.

The passage continues to say that during that time in Jerusalem, the feast of Weeks was happening at the same time. Therefore, among them were many God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven and when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. They were declaring the wonders of God in their own tongues!

In our Anglican tradition, we honor unity in our diversity. Our worship includes both the Bible and The Book of Common Prayer to assist us in our worship and personal spiritual life. The Book of Common Prayer contain written liturgies we may use every Sunday. They also contain Collects and prayers to center our intentions for the worship. The Book of Common Prayer is used universally in over 165 countries throughout the world, with at least 200 different languages, so whenever you are visiting, we all worship using the same liturgical calendar for the day, same prayers and same liturgies, but in different languages. For example, if you are attending an Anglican Church in Hong Kong on a Sunday, they would be

worshipping with the same passages we use here on this Sunday, same Collects and prayers but most likely spoken in Cantonese.

This is a glimpse of what Pentecost's unity in diversity might have felt like. Despite their cultural differences, there was one understanding of God in spirit.

Pope Francis once noted, "It is not easy to enter into another culture, to put oneself in the shoes of people so different from us, to understand their thoughts and their experiences." Still we are called to welcome and create spaces of encounter. It is in the turning away from our neighbor in need where sin lies, according to Francis. When we focus on our differences, it is easy to hold one's own culture and way of praying as superior. This is not the message of Pentecost."

You can say Pentecost brought everyone together in Christ as one. We are united within our God-given diversity of life's stories and personal experiences.

Speaking about honoring our uniqueness, Gustavo Gutierrez, a Dominican Priest and one of the founders of liberation theology in Latin America, says, "no theology is without its own accent in speaking of God—differences in speaking must be respected. It is not imposed uniformity that is required but unity in diversity."

Praying together in different languages is one way that we encounter one another

and the Holy Spirit in our midst.” When we let go of my own anxieties we are able to simply be one in prayer with other communities.

Here at St. Michael’s we honor diversity and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are grateful for our church, where we can learn and practice our faith. Why is church important in our modern fast pace world? Because church plays a role in our society to bring understanding of the meaning of life and the meaning of truth. It plays a role in every stage of our journey through life. From the time a child begins to comprehend, to a young adult facing questions, to parents who have to make wise decisions, and to those in retirement, our faith matters, and our church plays a role in that, it is our connection to God.

Every second Sunday of each month, we welcome the parents of our Children’s Center to family worship. Although our buildings may not be connected, we are still connected to each other in important ways. We both play roles in providing the best learning for the development of our children. Every Wednesday, it’s my joy to be with them at chapel. One of the children’s favorite song during chapel says, “Jesus Loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white they are precious in his sight. Jesus, loves the little children of the world.” After we sing, I explain to them that Jesus loves every skin color of the world, and loves everyone for who they are, including friends who have

disabilities. Then I ask them, do you think Jesus loves you? And I hear a resounding “YES”

This is why Pentecost Sunday is a joyous event. It is the birth of the church which offers education that is different from public schools. It is a place to form a foundation of faith, because one day, these young children will grow up and remember during their toughest days that Jesus loves them for who they are, or what are becoming. As church family, or blood family, we may never be always by their side, but Jesus will be, and they need to know this deep in their hearts while they are young. We all need to help achieve this. Being around the honesty and enthusiasm of children’s faith keeps me humble...including a recent comment from one child when he got his sticker at the end of the service. He leaned over and said, “Father, you’re old.”

Happy Pentecost Sunday! Amen.