

May 24, 2026  
Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## “One in the Spirit”

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.”

There are certain pieces of mail that bring us joy as soon as we take them out of our mailboxes. It may be an invitation to a wedding or birthday party, a tax refund cheque, or even the latest Canadian Tire flyer. Then there are other pieces of mail that we do not want to find when we check our daily Canada Post delivery: a notice from Canada Revenue regarding an audit of our recent tax return, or a letter from our bank informing us that our loan application had been denied, or a notice of an increase in our car insurance. But perhaps the most unwelcome of all pieces of mail is a summons to jury duty. This is not to be confused with an invitation; the summons makes it abundantly clear that we have no choice in this matter, which ignoring such a summons can have serious legal consequences. While there are some ways a person can get an exemption from jury duty, for the most part when the summons arrives in the mail, we have no choice but to present ourselves at the courthouse on our assigned day.

My first experience with jury duty happened when I was serving my first congregation in New Jersey (in case you are wondering if clergy get automatic exemptions, our bishop was not only summoned but served on a jury; so much for us parish pastors expecting an exemption!). I arrived at the courthouse at my designated time (at least there was assigned parking for jurors) and soon I was in a courtroom where a judge swore us in as potential jurors and gave us a speech about how jury duty is a part of our civic responsibility as citizens, a speech he probably had given hundreds of times. We were then ushered into a waiting room where, along with hundreds of other jurors, I waited until we were brought into another courtroom for jury selection. Throughout the two days of my required time in the Union County Courthouse (I was never empaneled on a jury), I waited with my fellow citizens who had been summoned for this duty, not knowing exactly what to expect but knowing we had no other choice but to wait.

As we celebrate the Day of Pentecost, one of the chief festival days of the church year, we encounter another group who have been summoned together and who have no choice but to wait. Luke begins his account of what happened on this day when he reports that *“when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one*

*place.*” (Acts 2:1). The group to whom he refers are the disciples who had been with the risen Lord Jesus Christ at the end of Luke’s Gospel, when he appears to them before his ascension and commissions them as witnesses to the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ while also instructing them to “*stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49). In obedience to his commandment, following his ascension “*they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*” (24:52-53). As the Evangelist begins his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, he mentions that “*while staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.*” (Acts 1:4). As Jesus’ ministry began when the Holy Spirit descended upon him as he prayed following his baptism (*the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’* – Luke 3:22), the Church’s ministry will begin when the disciples “*will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*” (Acts 1:5).

The disciples who had heard Jesus’ command to remain in Jerusalem until the fulfillment of his promise of the Holy Spirit did not know how long that period of waiting would last. For these days in between, they did little other than appointing Matthias to take the place of Judas Iscariot in the Twelve. This group of followers (which may have numbered over 120 persons) continued to wait in obedience until “*the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,*” which indicates that the coming of the Holy Spirit is the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation (“*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” – Luke 9:51). Pentecost (“fiftieth day”) was celebrated by Diaspora Jews as a day-long harvest festival more common known as the “Feast of Weeks” (*Shavuot*) and scheduled fifty days following Passover (“*You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labour, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labour.*” – Exodus 23:16). Pentecost was one of the three great pilgrimage feasts of Israel (“*Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths.*” – Deuteronomy 16:16); it was a festival “*when the entire household of Israel gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the goodness of God toward the nation.*” (Robert W. Wall).

As the city filled with pilgrims “*from every nation under heaven*” (Acts 2:5), the disciples remained together, observing their period of obedient waiting, not knowing how long they would have to endure this time of uncertainty but trusting that Jesus would be faithful in fulfilling his promise. This time of faithful waiting ends when

*“suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting”* (2:2). Throughout Scripture, “wind” (*pneuma*) is often a sign of the presence of God’s Spirit (*“Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD ...”* – 1 Kings 19:11). The sign of fire recalls John the Baptist’s prophecy that the one to come *“will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Luke 3:16). The initial readers of Luke’s description of the events of that day would not have been surprised that the promised Spirit arrives from heaven sounding like a “violent wind” and appearing like “tongues of fire,” for the inbreaking of heaven into human affairs is a central feature of Luke’s narrative world. It should be noted that the passage does not claim that the Holy Spirit *is* a wind or fire; rather, the Spirit is compared to the sound wind makes (... *while a wind of God swept over the waters”* – Genesis 1:2) and to the flames fire produces (*“There an angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.”* (Exodus 3:2). The Evangelist’s intent *“is to create an impression of the Spirit’s presence among the community of the Lord’s disciples as its distinguishing feature”* (Wall). The result of this appearance of wind and fire and the description of *“divided tongues, as of fire, [appearing] among them, and a tongue rested on each of them”* is that *“all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability”* (2:3-4). The image of “tongues of fire” (*glossai hosei pyros*) heralds the gift of speaking in foreign languages previously unknown to these disciples as the Spirit enables the community, especially the apostles, to testify publicly to Israel.

- “On the day of Pentecost, a Jewish festival set fifty days after Passover, they were all together in one place when they got a crash course in power. First there was wind, then there was fire, then they were filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowed with strange languages: one spoke Parthian while another spoke Latin, and two others found their tongues curling around the exotic sounds of Egyptian and Arabic.” – Barbara Brown Taylor.

These Spirit-filled disciples may not have understood what they were saying, but the crowds who were assembled in Jerusalem understood their words clearly: *“at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each”* (2:6). They are in part bewildered because those who were speaking these words were Galileans, people who were notorious for their lack of linguistic knowledge and whose distinctive accent would have been easily recognized by the crowds (as Peter was recognized as one of Jesus’ followers following Christ’s betrayal and arrest: *“Surely this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean”* – Luke 22:59). The countries mentioned in this litany of nations cover

most of the world known to first-century Palestine and symbolize the fact that the Church will embrace the whole world, transcending all barriers of race, class, and nation. They include the regions of Israel's historic enemies, Mesopotamia and Egypt, fulfilling God's promise that Israel's oppressors would one day turn and acknowledge the God of Israel as the one true God:

- “On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.’” – Isaiah 19:24-25.

The church's proclamation of the mighty acts of God begins with faithful Jews who constitute an international assembly who are astounded because *“in our own tongues we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power”* (2:11). The fact that Jews from many nations hear the disciples speaking about God's deeds of power in their own languages portends that the ancient tragedy of Babel, when *“the LORD confused the language of all the earth, and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth”* (Genesis 11:9), has now been reversed. At Pentecost, *“the Spirit-given ability of Jesus' disciples to speak in various languages signifies that God is beginning to overcome human divisions”* (William S. Kurz). This puzzling linguistic phenomenon causes the listener's bewilderment even garners snide comments that they must be drunk: *“All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’”* (2:12-13). There is irony in the dismissive comments of this last group, for in the Old Testament, new or sweet wine symbolized the joy and abundant blessing that God would give God's people in the messianic age (*“I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit”* – Amos 9:13). In Mark, Jesus promised that he would give his followers the “new wine” of divine life (*“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”* – Mark 2:22). At Pentecost, the “new wine” is the Holy Spirit, the gift of God's love poured into human hearts, *“because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5)

- “They are not drunk in the way you might think. They are indeed drunk, but with the sober intoxication which kills sin and gives life to the heart and which is the opposite of physical drunkenness. Drunkenness makes a person forget what he knows; this kind, instead, brings understanding of things that were

not formerly known. They are drunk insofar as they have drunk the wine of that mystical vine which affirms, 'I am the vine, you are the branches' (John 15:5). – St. Cyril of Jerusalem.

It is at this point of confusion and derision that "*Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them*" (2:14). Peter stands as the leader of the apostolic Twelve and so continues the teaching ministry of Jesus; his standing with the other apostles means that "*they expressed themselves through one common voice, and he was the mouth of all.*" (St. John Chrysostom). Peter invites the crowd to "*let this be known to you, and listen to what I say*"; Israel's ignorance of their Messiah, which has provoked derision rather than confession, will be reversed only if they listen well to the prophet's message. After pointing to the time to refute the claim that the apostles were drunk, Peter refers to the prophecy of Joel to explain what is being experienced, announcing that what the crowd is experiencing is the longed-for outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh:

- "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." – 2:17, Joel 2:28).

Pentecost initiates Israel into a new epoch – "the last days" – of God's salvation history when "God declares" the events that fulfill biblical prophecy in God's script of salvation. It is a time when the Spirit will be bestowed on every category of people: men and women, young and old, slave and free; for "*God's Holy Spirit lives within every Christian and makes each one a son or daughter of God, empowered to act as God's servant in word and deed.*" (Kurz). This time will include "*portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist*" (2:19); such wonders in the heavens are typical in biblical prophecies of the last days, when God would intervene in history to destroy evil and restore the fortunes of God's people ("*For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.*" – Isaiah 13:10). But unlike the presentation of these dramatic occurrences as signs of the arrival of the "Day of the Lord" in judgment of the nations in the Old Testament, here these "signs and wonders" mark the presence and progress of the Holy Spirit who prepares the way for the church's missionary work ("*The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.*" – 15:12). The "*coming of the Lord's great and glorious day*" (2:20) is Pentecost, with its promise of empowered witness and God's salvation. It is the day that begins the mission of the

Church that Christ envisioned when he commissioned his disciples in the power of the Spirit to *“be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth”* (1:8) so that *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (2:21). The epicenter of Luke’s theological conception of Israel’s restoration is the God who forgives every person who names Jesus as their Lord and confesses him as God’s Messiah; for *“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”* (4:12).

- “Jesus is Lord because he is risen and has conquered death forever! To confess Jesus is Lord is to say that he is *my* Lord, my Saviour, my King; that I have placed my life under his authority and that my whole destiny belongs to him ... the existential knowledge that Jesus is Lord, a living presence in our lives, is meant to be the inheritance of every Christian.” – Kurz.

As a mailing regarding jury duty is not an invitation but a summons, as God’s people we have been summoned to gather as those who have been baptized into the church which is the Body of Christ. In his explanation of the Third Commandment, Martin Luther teaches that *“we are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God’s word but instead keep that word hold and gladly hear and learn it.”* Our Augsburg Confession defines that church as *“the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached, and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”* As we celebrate Confirmation with our young people who affirm their baptismal promises this morning, we all renew our commitment to *“continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper”* (ELW Affirmation of Baptism). As we have been incorporated into the one body of Christ in baptism, we are summoned to live together as God’s people in worship and service, so that we might make *“every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4:3). As the disciples received the Holy Spirit as they were gathered together as one body at Pentecost, so we will be blessed by the same empowerment that makes us one in the Spirit so that we might *“proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

- “At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended, and with a mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire for a moment overcame human differences and united that diverse and dispirited company by the gift of understanding. They hear the good news as they were, where they were, and they were never the same again. Pentecost is many things – fire, wind, ecstasy, and renewal – but more than all that it is the Spirit whose gift is that of understanding, of knowing who and whose we are. We celebrate today once again that gift to them and to us, and

we pray that what transformed them may transform us, and with us the world for God and Christ.” – Peter Gomes.

A summons to jury duty is not something we usually receive with joy, but it is a part of our duty as citizens of our community and nation. As members of the church whose citizenship is rooted in our baptism into Christ Jesus, we are summoned to live together as one body in worship and in service so that we who have one in the Spirit may continue to proclaim the one hope of our calling: “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). May we continue to live as a people who are one in the Spirit so that we might share the good news of our Saviour who comes to make us one people who worship and serve all people in the name of the one who makes us one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.