

# *Still Many Things to Say*

By  
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from the pulpit of  
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

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Pentecost  
Confirmation Sunday

Acts 2:1-4;12-17

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you

suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>'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.

John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

<sup>26</sup> When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

<sup>12</sup>'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Today is Pentecost, the birthday of the church, celebrated in many ways around the world. In Greece, Pentecost is a two-day celebration with Monday a national holiday. In South Africa some churches will hear a large circle of drums to mimic the thundering of wind. Old European cathedrals were designed with “Holy Spirit holes” so that rose petals could be dropped upon the congregation from above representing flames of fire. Larry and I were in New York City over Memorial Day weekend many years ago and attended the Riverside church to hear the famed Jim Forbes preach on Pentecost. They had wind machines, huge fans with sound effects, strategically placed around the sanctuary, and while the choir sang of the *Rush of a Mighty Wind*, the whole congregation felt it blowing all around us.

This kind of dynamic observance of Pentecost is celebrated here today by the reception of eighteen members of the Confirmation Class joining the church. These Eighth Graders have spent a year studying the Bible, exploring what it means to be a Christian and a member of the church. Their Confirmation projects reflect a beautiful array of bringing their artistic talent, interest in Bible study and prayer, a call to serve others and journaling their gratitude - all expressions of deepening faith and commitment.

Pastor Leigh has said of their journey: “They have learned much in their time together, and I have been honored to walk alongside them as they asked deep questions of faith... I am so proud of this class of Confirmands and cannot wait to see how the Church becomes a more loving, faithful, and just place because of them, their passions, and the ways God has formed them to bring peace and wholeness to the church and the world.”

Leigh’s description of her experience with this wonderful group of confirmands testifies to the power of God’s Spirit unleashed among a diverse gathering of God’s people, just as the Acts of the Apostles describes that first Pentecost when: *your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young shall see visions, and your old shall dream*

*dreams.* This birth of the church coincided with the Jewish holiday that falls fifty days after Passover, thus the name Pentecost, which is essentially fifty days after Easter. For ancient Israel it was a day on which the community celebrated God's giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. It was a pilgrimage gathering of God's people in Jerusalem from varying nations and languages which is the back drop in the book of Acts. The gift of God's Spirit became visibly and audibly revealed, a loud and large celebration, with a hundred and twenty people in the house and thousands more in the streets. Luke describes a violent wind sweeping through the room, tongues of fire resting on the people, while they speak all at once in languages from all over the known world. The crowd was astonished; and Peter stood up and bellowed his sermon over the chaotic, fiery, wind-swept jubilation. Three thousand people chose to be baptized that very day!

You know the tale of young children being taught this story of Pentecost, and one of them saying, "My family must of skipped church that day." So, lest we think ecstatic, faithful worship has gone down hill since that high, holy day in Jerusalem, take heart.

New Testament scholar, Fred Craddock, helpfully reminds us that there is another, smaller and quieter version of the arrival of God's Spirit that's based in a prayer and a promise. The Gospel of John may be more closely aligned with our experiences of God's Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is hunkered down with his disciples, preparing them for his coming death and resurrection, and assuring them they will not be left alone, abandoned by God. I think a faithful reading of this text is to say that Jesus is teaching in a way that is something like a Confirmation Class. After a while, parents have to let their children decide for themselves about matters of faith. Here Jesus is doing what we as a church are doing today. He is preparing the disciples for ministry without his being physically present with them any longer. He's giving them their own set of keys, if you will; he's assuring them they are ready to launch into their own ways of

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Craddock, *The Cherry Log Sermons*, p. 66 ff.

being faithful and doing ministry. Jesus promises they will not and never will be completely on their own. He is sending them the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth who will accompany them and lead them.

At the heart of this promise, Jesus says a most remarkable thing: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now...* It's a way of saying, faith grows. The presence of God is revealed in new ways over a lifetime. There is such a thing as a sudden conversion when a person is moved to commit to Christ as Paul did on the Road to Damascus, but even the new convert does not learn everything that God wants to teach us in one fell swoop. *I still have many things to say to you...* but you do not need to know everything now. This is the quiet, comforting version of Pentecost. Step by step, day by day, year by year, Jesus says the Spirit of Truth will continue to reveal new truths. All we have to do is live in the promises, trust in the promises, depend upon the promises.

Peter Marty is a Lutheran pastor and Editor of *The Christian Century*. He tells a story about going to the hospital to visit a church member who was nearing the end of her long and remarkable life. The doctor had just told her grown son his mother has only hours to live. He noted that the faith of this elderly saint had not quite taken hold in her son. By all outward measures he lived a good life, was highly successful in the tech industry, but appeared to be absolutely lost at that moment. Peter Marty noticed his discomfort, and the son admitted he did not want to be there. "Are you uncomfortable because we're in the hospital or is it the struggle to let Mom go?" "Both", the son said, admitting he'd never been in a hospital, but then he also said, "I don't have any idea what to do with her death." The conversation continued and the pastor came to realize he was not talking about making funeral arrangements when the time came. He was talking about his unbelief, his inability to find peace and consolation at the end of life, even a long life well lived. He had no familiarity with the hope we have in the resurrection, and no practice of recognizing the presence of God there with him.

Marty wrote, “As I looked into his eyes, it felt like I was peering into a lost soul, a grown man with no idea of where to turn next or what to do with the death of the one who brought him into this world. To someone of unbelief sitting beside you in a hospital waiting room, how do you describe the power of faith, the significance of hope, or the meaning of life? How do you realistically acquaint them with the riches or comfort of faith during a twenty-minute sit-down?” He answers his own question, “You can’t.” Faith is accumulated. Faith is accumulated “through steady habits, disciplined practices, and reliable instincts that take shape over long stretches of time. It’s a way of life that acquires its layers and contours incrementally, developing ever so gradually and often imperceptibly. He concludes, “The Christian life doesn’t emerge overnight any more than friendship does. The internal dispositions that form our character establish themselves often unselfconsciously and over the course of many uneventful days.”<sup>2</sup>

Friends, this is why we take baptism seriously and make promises to nurture one another in faith. This is why we give a full year to the Confirmation journey and allocate our best resources of involving families, pastors, teachers and mentors, who trust in the power of the Spirit to walk with us and to reveal new truths to us over a lifetime. So that at whatever difficult or complicated crossroads we may find ourselves – in a hospital waiting room, or while undergoing a battery of diagnostic tests; at the far end of a rejection, or while a relationship blows up and disintegrates; in the face of an injustice when our energies and intelligence are called to enact change, or even at the precipice of a joyful new transition in life – a marriage, a birth, a new calling, we will not find our souls lost. Instead, we will have some of the faith resources our confirmation class has shown they have: a creative engagement with the Spirit through art; facility in being grateful every day; a special calling to serve others in need; a memorized passage of scripture they can pull up anywhere, any time; a comfort and familiarity with prayer, with the very breath of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Marty, “The Accumulation of Faith,” *The Christian Century*, February, 2024.

With these kinds of accumulated resources, none of us needs to know every knowable thing about God. We simply live into this promise: By the Spirit of the Risen Christ, throughout all our days, God is with us and still has more in store to reveal to us. God still has many things to say.

AMEN.